MODERN PARLIAMENTARY ELOQUENCE

THE REDE LECTURE

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BY

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TORONTO

ONLY a small portion of this Lecture was delivered at Cambridge, owing to limitations of time. The whole is now published, as a more comprehensive study of the question than could be inferred from the condensed reports that appeared in the Press.

MODERN PARLIAMENTARY ELOQUENCE

A YEAR and a half ago the Master of the most famous College in this illustrious University, your own Dr. Butler, himself a speaker of unsurpassed grace and felicity, came over to my University of Oxford to deliver the Romanes Lecture on Lord Chatham as an Orator. He confessed in his opening remarks that it had at first been his intention to deal with the history and influence of British Oratory during the century and a half from Chatham to Gladstone, but that second thoughts had induced him to curtail the range of his ambition and to confine himself to a single exemplar, though perhaps the noblest of all. There were many who regretted the self-restraint of the lecturer, and who felt that a unique opportunity had been lost of hearing judgment passed on one of the foremost of arts by one of its most gifted exponents.

Scope of address.

In accepting the invitation of your Vice-Chancellor to come to Cambridge and deliver to you the Rede Lecture this afternoon, I do not presume to handle the bow from which even Dr. Butler shrunk. But I take up the subject at the other or modern end, and I shall endeavour to present to you some analysis, however imperfect, of contemporary British eloquence as it has appeared to one whose public life, though by no means long, has yet enabled him to hear all the greatest speakers from Gladstone, Disraeli, Bright, to the present day, and to whom the comparison between the public speaking of the past and present has always appealed as a subject of more than ephemeral interest. By Modern Parliamentary Eloquence I mean the eloquence of the past fifty years—the speaking which men still living can remember to have heard. It will be my endeavour to examine the conditions under which this phase

of the art—if art I may still presume to call it—has been produced; to consider its titles to honour, and to contrast it with the Parliamentary eloquence of earlier times.

Meaning of title.

In the title of my address I have designedly used the word Eloquence in preference to Oratory, for two reasons. First, because the phrase Oratory seems to connote a very high and superlative degree of excellence, to which speakers under modern conditions only rarely attain—so that, if my theme were confined to modern Orators, I should very soon be at the end of my rope; secondly, because, while Eloquence, irrespective of age or clime, is a part of the continuous though rare endowment of man, Oratory in the classical sense of the term, as an art taught, studied, and pursued, has practically ceased to exist, and has almost become the traditional subject of a gibe or a sneer.

Classical conception of Rhetoric.

Far, indeed, have we gone from the days, when—as the classical studies, in which this University still retains, and I hope may long preserve, its old pre-eminence, have taught us—Oratory, or Rhetoric as it was called by the ancients, was regarded as the first of the arts, equal, if not superior, to poetry and painting, to sculpture and the drama; an art that in the Commonwealths of Greece and Rome was the supreme accomplishment of the educated man. As Disraeli put it, in "The Young Duke," "oratory was their most efficient mode of communicating thought; it was their substitute for printing."[1]

It would be wide of my present purpose to pursue the development of this art as it was expounded in the master-treatise of Aristotle; as it was practised by the great Athenian orators; and as it passed from the Academies of Greece to those of Rome. Happily your own great scholar, Richard Jebb, a speaker himself of exquisite refinement and unusual command of form, has relieved us of the task in the introductory chapter of his famous work on the Attic Orators. In passing, however, let me take note of the fact, to which I

[1] Part v. cap vi.

shall again revert, in the contrast that it indicates with more modern conceptions, that the oratory of the Greeks and Romans was essentially the oratory of art, and therefore of preparation. Though it is on record that Demosthenes was an effective extemporaneous speaker, yet neither he nor any other of the ancient masters of the art improvised if they could possibly avoid it. It was inconsistent with the conception of their art, an infringement of its canons, a blot upon its perfection, to do so. Had they been told that the best speaker in later times would be regarded as the man who could extemporise most readily, or most adroitly conceal the degree of his preparation, they would have been shocked at so grave an affront to Rhetoric. They wrote their speeches with as solemn a deliberation as Milton, in imitation of them, wrote his famous discourse on freedom of speech; they sometimes wrote speeches which were never delivered at all, but which were published by their authors, without a vestige of self-consciousness, as artistic masterpieces to be studied and admired; they wrote speeches to be delivered by other people; and, indeed, when the actual texts of their orations were not forthcoming, other people re-wrote their speeches for them.[1] It cannot, I imagine, be doubted that the celebrated Funeral Oration of Pericles was the work far more of Thucydides, re-composing the speech from the ideas of Pericles and from such data as survived, than it was of Pericles himself.

Modern academic practice.

The Greek and Roman conception of Oratory as an art to be studied reappeared in the Universities of the Middle Ages, both in England and on the Continent, where rhetorical exercises and disputations were a part of the prescribed curriculum. They have long since vanished from an academic world which offers annual prizes to its students for futile declamations in Latin and erudite compositions in Greek, but which never dreams of teaching them how to

[1] A variation on this method was that of the French orator Mirabeau, who used to deliver speeches composed for him by friends. They saved him the trouble by composing the text, and he turned the dull metal into gold by his own genius and individuality.

make a speech in their native tongue. Upon such an iron time has the art fallen. Truly would the Attic or Roman orator think that we live in a mad world if his spirit, reincarnated for a brief hour, could flit from the banks of the Ilissus or the Tiber to those of the Isis or the Cam.

But bidding good-bye to this conception of an oratory that has passed away, and reverting to our own more modest claims, the question may still be asked: "What, for the purposes of this address, is the scope and meaning to be attached to the title that I have taken?" When I use the word "Eloquence," let me say, then, that I do not allude to the talent of mere facility or glibness of speech, or even of rhetoric in its later application—the talent to which a speaker refers when he says, "After the eloquent remarks to which we have just listened, there is nothing for me to add." No, by Eloquence I here mean the highest manifestation of the power of speech, of which—in an age where oratory is no longer recognised or practised as an art—public speakers are still capable. For it will be a part of my argument—paradoxical as it may appear—that while oratory, strictly so-called, has passed under a cloud, and the orator, if haply he does emerge, is almost regarded as suspect—yet never was eloquence, *i.e.* the power of moving men by speech, more potent than now; though it has never been less studied as an art, yet never was it more useful, or I may add, more admired as an accomplishment.

Meaning of term Eloquence.

While, therefore, I have no new definition of oratory or eloquence to offer—for the secret of the finest speaking is in itself undefinable—I shall yet be describing that which all men understand when I say that such and such a man was a real orator, or that such and such a speech was an example of true eloquence. We refer when we use such phrases to no ordinary or commonplace gift. We mean that upon the head of such a man tongues as of fire have descended from heaven; that the silver of ordinary speech is turned into gold on his lips; that he strikes a chord in our heart which thrills as though it had been touched by celestial fingers. And in forming this opinion

I shall judge—we can only judge—by the impression produced upon those who hear him. Oratory, for our purposes, is the vehicle of persuasion, not of prophecy or instruction or even of truth.[1]

Scott, in *Marmion*, sings of the happy time:

> "'Twixt boy and youth
> When thought is speech, and speech is truth."

The Art of persuasion.

Parliamentary eloquence lives and breathes in no such age of innocence. It ought always to spring from thought, but it has no necessary connection with truth. As early as the fifth century B.C. Isocrates defined rhetoric as the Science (a very curious word, typical of the Greek attitude) of persuasion. Aristotle only so far varied this definition as to lay down that the function of rhetoric was not to persuade, but to discover the available means of persuasion. Neither of them contended that it was an instrument for the propagation of truth.

Effect on the audience is the test.

In the same light and as a vehicle of persuasion must we still regard it. Of the three audiences whom the speaker has to face—the hearers of the moment, the readers of the morrow, and a remote posterity—the first are those in whose hands his fame as an orator really lies. It may be that the highest form of eloquence is the eloquence that can be read with as much pleasure as it was originally heard, and that the greatest masterpieces are those which live again as prose. Burke, indeed, who is commonly regarded as the foremost of our literary orators, was actually heard with much less enjoyment than that with which he was afterwards read. But while the orator who is to enjoy an enduring fame must subscribe to the double test, as did Pitt and Daniel Webster and Macaulay and Bright, he is not necessarily less an orator because he fails, for whatever reason, to satisfy the second requirement. We have not

[1] Machiavelli said of the speaking of Savonarola: "The secret of oratory lies, not in saying new things, but in saying things with a certain power that moves the hearers."

a single authentic sentence of Bolingbroke: we have only scattered fragments of Chatham, the majority of whose recorded speeches were later compilations. But the title of these two men to be considered as almost, if not quite, the supreme orators of the British race none will dispute. Perhaps their speeches would have read well: I cannot but believe it. But, if they did not, that would not have detracted at all from their fame as orators. Fox, indeed, who cared a great deal about immediate effect and very little for literature, went so far as to say that if a speech read well it must have been a d——d bad speech. That of course is a paradox. Mr. Gladstone, however, would have given great satisfaction to Fox. It is doubtful if posterity will preserve with reverence or read with enjoyment any but a few passages in a few of his almost countless harangues. And yet who that heard him would deny to him the gift of oratory in the highest degree? As Mr. Balfour well said in his eulogium of that statesman delivered in the House of Commons after the latter's death (May 20, 1898):

"Mr. Gladstone's speeches are of a kind that make it impossible for those who read them in any sense to judge of their excellence. Posterity must take it from us, who heard with our own ears the extraordinary gifts of pathos, humour, invective, detailed exposition, of holding the audience and interesting them in the most intricate and dry matters of administrative and financial detail—that they had all these qualities. If you go and take down a volume of his speeches and read them, you will not believe what I tell you; but I am telling you the truth. It is not the speeches which read best which are the greatest speeches. Posterity cannot possibly judge of their merit by a mere study of the words used. They must see the man, feel the magnetism of his presence, see his gestures, the flash of his eyes. . . . The test of a speaker is the audience he addresses. There is no other judge; from that Court there is no appeal."

Ben Jonson said of Bacon that "the fear of every man that heard him was that he should make an end." If so Bacon also was among the first of orators: it is only Mr. Balfour's proposition stated in another form. Lord Morley is reported once to have said: "Three things matter in a speech—who says it, how he says it, and what he says, and of the three the last matters the least." The gay cynicism of this remark may be forgiven for its underlying truth.

Let me take another and renowned illustration. Sheridan's famous speech on the Begums of Oude on the motion for the impeachment of Warren Hastings in the House of Commons in February, 1787, was described by Byron as "the very best oration ever conceived or heard in this country." This might be set down as the pardonable exaggeration of a poet—an exaggeration not unfamiliar to ourselves, for how often have we not heard men say, even in these degenerate days, that such and such a speech was the finest that they had ever heard—were it not that Byron's verdict was re-echoed by Burke and Pitt, by Wilberforce and Fox, who all heard the speech. Upon their judgment it is impossible to deny to Sheridan the distinction of having made a speech of superlative merit (and he made two others nearly as good), or to exclude him from the inner circle of the foremost orators. But the speech itself we cannot judge either as literature or as art, for Sheridan, with an admirable discretion, refused, even for an offer of £1000, to publish it, and the reporting in those days was so bad that the text was to all intents and purposes lost.

In dealing with the Parliamentary speakers of our time I shall, accordingly, confine myself to those whom I have myself heard, or for whom I can quote the testimony of others who heard them; and I shall not regard them as prose writers or literary men, still less as purveyors of instruction to their own or to future generations, but as men who produced, by the exercise of certain talents of speech, a definite impression upon contemporary audiences, and whose reputation for eloquence must be judged by that test, and that test alone.

But perhaps, before I come to individuals, I may endeavour to summarise the main conditions under which modern Parliamentary eloquence is produced, and to show how materially they differ from those which prevailed in what is generally regarded as the golden age of British oratory, viz., the second half of the eighteenth century. In this difference lies a complete and sufficient

Conditions of modern eloquence.

explanation of the apparent decline of British eloquence. The reason is not that a particular fountain of human genius has been dried at its source, never again to be revived, but that it flows into new channels, and irrigates a fresh soil. Or, if the metaphor may be varied, men's souls are still capable of being set on fire by the spoken word; but the spark is otherwise kindled, and it lights a less radiant and consuming flame.

Oratory of the Eighteenth century.

If we study the oratory of the great speakers of the Georgian epoch, from Chatham down to Canning—for with the latter the tradition may be said to have expired—we shall at once see that it was the art of an aristocratic society, practised under aristocratic conditions, in an aristocratic age. The great speakers were drawn from a few families, frequently connected by ties of intermarriage. They had received the same public school and University education, deliberately framed to qualify them, not merely for participation in public life, but for proficiency in public speech. The elder Pitt insisted on the younger making a special study of Thucydides when he went up to Cambridge. The son gladly responded to the father's admonitions, and read and translated the celebrated orators of the ancient world. Virgil, Horace, Cicero, Juvenal, even the later Roman poets,[1] were more familiar to them than are Tennyson and Browning to us. They quoted their favourite authors, they capped each other's efforts and, above all, they understood (*i.e.*, the few who counted, understood) each other's quotations. When they went down to the House of Parliament a similar dignity characterised their dress and deportment, regularised their hours of leisurely labour, and pervaded the debates. The House met early in the afternoon, and usually finished its proceedings on the same day. They did not mind sitting up late at night—that was a part of the social habit of the time—and we read of many of the finest orations having been delivered in the early hours of the morning, even long after the

[1] Burke, in his famous speech on Fox's East India Bill, quoted Silius Italicus. Another orator quoted Claudian.

dawn. The speakers wore breeches and silk stockings; their heads were powdered or wigged; the blue riband of the Garter crossed their breasts. A sitting of the House partook almost of the nature of a Court ceremonial.[1] No reverberations from the democracy (which did not exist) penetrated the comparatively small and secluded chamber, no importunities from constituents, no calls to public platforms, no engagements in Committee rooms or on the Terrace, no sharp reminders from caucuses or agents, disturbed the stately equanimity of their proceedings. They spoke as they dressed, and moved, and I may add, drank, with a fine profusion, and in the grand style. In fact, apart from political differences, which, in days of universal place-hunting and corruption, were probably more acrimonious than at the present time, the governing class in both Houses of Parliament constituted a social caste, banded together by ties of common interest and mutual admiration. They dissected, criticised, and applauded each other's speeches. The leisure hours of those who possessed literary qualifications were often devoted to writing about each other's attainments. The dramatic displays of the great protagonists were always assured of a rapt audience and a befitting arena, for the simple reason that the number of those who could speak was limited, and that the remainder were content to furnish an inarticulate claque in the background. Lord John Russell used to say that there were a dozen men in the days of Fox and Pitt who could make a better speech than anyone living in his time, but that there was not another man in the House who could even understand what they were talking about.

[1] There is an interesting passage in "Endymion," cap. 76, in which Sir Fraunceys Scoope—believed to have been drawn from Sir Francis Burdett—describes to the young M.P. (circ. 1842) the conditions of the House of Commons as they were in the days of Pitt and Fox. There was rarely a regular debate, and never a party division up till Easter, and very few people came up. After Easter there was always one great party fight, which was talked of for weeks in advance After this, for the rest of the Session, the House was a mere club, to which members came down in evening dress. So late as the time of Canning they appeared in silk stockings and knee breeches or pantaloons.

This cynical reflection somewhat exaggerates the gap between the players and the pit, but it presents a not unfaithful picture of a number of highly-gifted actors performing serenely to a compact and deferential crowd. Add to the influence of these surroundings the fact that great events—wars on the Continent, the rebellion of the American Colonies, the Government of India, the revolution in France—occupied the attention and inspired the eloquence of the leading statesmen—creating an atmosphere favourable to great emotions and to rhetorical display. It is not surprising in these circumstances that Parliamentary eloquence should have blossomed into an exuberant growth, that the models of the ancient world should have been diligently emulated, and almost reproduced, or that oratory for more than half a century reappeared in England in the garb of an exclusive and fashionable art.

Modern conditions.

Contrast with this *mise-en-scène* the picture of Parliamentary life, as it has been gradually evolved in the interval between the passing of the Great Reform Bill and the present day, *i.e.* in the time during which the constitution in its practical working has been converted from an aristocratic oligarchy into a democracy ever gaining in strength until it is now supreme. We may trace the change as it has affected the speaker as an individual, Parliament as an institution, the audiences to whom speeches are delivered, and the temper of the time.

The modern M.P.

The member of Parliament in the present day is no longer exclusively drawn from what used to be called the upper classes. The bulk of the House are probably contributed by what would a century ago have been termed the upper middle classes. No obstacles exist to the entry of the labouring classes, who are certain, as time passes, to increase their representation. Thus it has come about that while the types and standards of education that are represented in the House are many and various, the one type which is in the minority is that which was once supreme, viz.,

that which is based on the continuous study and knowledge of the Greek and Roman classics. How many men are there in the House of Commons who have ever read an oration of Demosthenes, or could translate a speech of Cicero? Thus one class of model has altogether vanished. And if it be said that there is no need to go back to the ancients, and that it is open to anyone to study the oratorical masterpieces of our own country, may it not again be asked, "Where and by whom are they now taught? Is there a single candidate for Parliament who has ever, except of his own initiative, read a speech of Pitt or analysed the methods of Grattan or Canning?" Thus the link of a common education in accepted models has vanished, and the power of speech that a man takes to the House when he enters it is that which has been developed in the college debating society, or on the platform, but not in the study of the past. He need not for that reason be an ineffective speaker—very often quite the reverse; but in so far as knowledge and education can make a man an orator, he is without that resource.

Decline of classical quotations.

We see this decline of oratorical furniture in the rapid diminution of quotation and literary allusion in the speeches of the day. More than a century ago Fox is said to have advised as to quotations "No Greek—as much Latin as you like, and never French under any circumstances; no English poet unless he has completed his century." In my own time I can only recall two Greek quotations in the House of Commons: one was from a scholar of Balliol, the present Prime Minister, the other from another Balliol man, the late Lord Percy, who once repeated a line from Euripides.[1] Mr. Gladstone not infrequently quoted

[1] Disraeli, in an address to the students of Glasgow University in 1872, quoted a passage from Sophocles and then added: "In the perplexities of life I have sometimes found these lines a solace and a satisfaction; and I now deliver them to you to guide your consciences and to guard your lives." The students cheered sympathetically, but I have been told by one who knew the facts that Mr. Disraeli only acquired the quotation from an academic friend a little while before the meeting, and that a somewhat limited knowledge of Greek probably left him quite in the dark as to its meaning. The story

Latin,[1] but since his day it may be almost said, except in the case of popular tags, to have passed into the limbo of the unknown.[2] Our own poets, even Shakespeare, cut no great figure. There is too much reason to fear that quotation, except from an opponent's speeches, is a moribund accomplishment. And yet it is one of the most hallowed and effective implements of oratory.

And literary adornment.

The same argument applies to imagery, metaphor, antithesis, alliteration, trope—all the once popular adjuncts of the rhetorical art. When heard they are regarded with a mixture of suspicion and amused surprise. I sometimes wonder what sort of a reception would be given by the present House of Commons to the famous image of the junction of the Rhône and Saône (a far from rhetorical passage) employed by the elder Pitt to describe the coalition of Fox and Newcastle in 1754:

"At Lyons I was taken to the place where the two rivers meet; the one gentle, feeble, languid, and though languid, of no great depth; the other a boisterous and impetuous torrent. But different as they are, they meet at last."

So simple is the language, so natural is the beauty of this simile, that I am inclined to think it would pass muster even now. But I am not so sure of the more daring image applied by the younger Pitt to the later coalition between Fox and North in 1783, when he denounced the inauspicious union, and in the name of his

recalls to me another which was told me by Sir William Harcourt. That statesman, who had a great admiration for Lord Beaconsfield, visited him in his declining years at Hughenden. His host showed him round the library, and pointing with pride to one set of shelves said that they contained the two branches of literature from which he had derived throughout life the greatest consolation, namely, Theology and the Classics!

[1] The most famous case in his later years was the quotation from Lucretius (ii. 646) which appeared in the noble speech on the Affirmation Bill (the Bradlaugh case) on April 26th, 1883. It is reproduced in Morley's *Life*.

[2] Bright's one attempt at a Latin phrase was a notorious fiasco. In a debate in July, 1869, he spoke of Disraeli as entering the House *crinis* (vice crinibus) *disjectis*. Mr. Gladstone almost bounded from his seat with horror.

country forbade the banns. That is rhetoric—though of a high order—and would, I fear, only provoke a smile.

But the change in Parliament is far greater and far more prejudicial to the cultivation of oratory than any change in the individual member. In the first place the House of Commons is much more concerned with legislation and much less with administration than a century ago. In those days there were but few bills, and the main business of the House was to keep an eye on Ministers, to question their policy—particularly their foreign policy—to check their expenditure, and, for the party in opposition, to expose with as much vituperation as possible their alleged misdeeds. All these undertakings afforded natural material for oratory, and still more for invective. Now Parliament is immersed in the harassing details of legislation; it has become a gigantic workshop, in which the hum of the machinery is always ringing, and the dust from the spindles is flying thickly, in the air. A good deal of time is spent on interrogating Ministers; four-fifths of the remainder in the Committee Stage of Bills or the conversational discussion of the Estimates. The residuum that is left for full-dress debate is very small.

Change in Parliament.

Secondly, the House no longer has the first claim on its members; for the greater part of the sitting, its benches are relatively empty and are occupied in the main by those who want to catch the Speaker's eye and who retreat as soon as they have accomplished their object; the multiplicity of business takes them to the libraries, the writing-rooms, the lobbies—anywhere but the chamber itself. A man may have the gift of the winged word, but he cannot be eloquent to empty benches.

Thirdly, the power of the Whips and the tyranny of the party machine have grown so immensely that there is little opening left for independence—the natural seed-ground of oratory—and but rare opportunities of turning votes by eloquence. Speeches therefore tend to become standardised, and conform to a conventional and commonplace type.

But by far the greatest change that has been wrought in Parliamentary conditions, as they affect speaking, has been the result of verbatim reporting in the Press. At the time when Chatham thundered and Pitt lightened, reporting was treated as a gross breach of privilege by the House of Commons—a law which was constantly reasserted, and only evaded by surreptitious note-takers skulking in the galleries and reconstructing the speeches afterwards from such aids as their imperfect notes or memory might afford. In these circumstances the speaker, unconscious of Hansard and undeterred by the fear of the morrow's *Times*, could give the free rein to his imagination; could amplify, repeat, embellish, and adorn with impunity. But now that every word is taken down and that the speaker, particularly the prominent or Front Bench speaker, knows that he is addressing, not a private club, but a gathering that may embrace the whole nation, and in the case of Foreign Office debates a much wider audience still, he must walk delicately and measure his paces; he cannot frisk and frolic in the flowery meads of rhetoric; he dare not "let himself go" as Chatham or Fox could afford to do. As Lord Rosebery has epigrammatically remarked, "eloquence and stenography are not of congenial growth," and "as reporting improves eloquence declines."[1]

Effect of reporting.

These changes in the House have been the reflex of corresponding and even greater movements outside. The prodigious expansion of the Press and the universal empire of the telegraph have rendered the populace indifferent to Parliamentary debates. When they can get their politics served up hot and steaming along with the morning teacup in the leader of their favourite organ, why bother about Parliament? Why read the finest speech even of an orator or of a leader when the descriptive paragraph

Effect of the daily Press.

[1] There is perhaps something to be said on the other side. James Grant, who was a Parliamentary reporter, and wrote a book entitled *The Newspaper Press*, said that the temporary absence of reporters from the House of Commons in 1833, when they were excluded by the action of O'Connell, had a most deplorable effect on the eloquence of members, whose speeches became short, spiritless, and dull. Possibly, however, this was a Press Gallery point of view.

condenses it all into a few high-flavoured sentences, with the personal element and the *mise-en-scène* thrown in as well?[1]

Still more has the growth of platform speaking detracted from the vogue of Parliamentary eloquence. While it is the latter that still unlocks the door to Ministerial office, it is the platform which makes or unmakes leaders, and decides the fortunes of parties. No Parliamentary reputation, however great, will avail in the future to secure for a statesman the confidence of his party or the support of the nation unless it is confirmed by the verdict of the platform. It is there that the shrillest war-cries are uttered; there that the gauge of oratorical combat is thrown down. Lord Randolph Churchill would never have become leader of the House of Commons but for his platform triumphs. Mr. Lloyd George reserves the master-pieces of his peculiar style for Limehouse, Newcastle, and Swindon.

Effect of the platform.

It may be retorted that while these conditions operate to the depreciation of Parliamentary eloquence, they at the same time create a new standard and type of oratory, viz., that of the public meeting. This is undoubtedly the case, and the waning of one form of the art is accompanied, if it is not counterbalanced, by the growth of another. But that it is a different type, obeying different laws, and appealing to different emotions, is abundantly clear, if only because some of the most accomplished exponents of one style fail miserably in the other. Consider the main points of difference. On the platform the orator is addressing, as a rule and in the main, the members of his own political party: they have come to hear him perform, he is the star figure of the scene; he is free from interruption save such as springs from the often useful interjections of scattered opponents, or the undiscriminating enthusiasm of friends.

Nature of platform oratory.

[1] This is an entirely modern creation. The sentiments of our forefathers towards the sketch-writer may be inferred from the speech of the courtly Windham in December, 1798. "What," he asked, "was to become of the dignity of the House, if the manners and gestures and tone and action of each member were to be subject to the licence, the abuse, the ribaldry of newspapers?"

No one can refute him or say him nay. The speech is delivered in the electric atmosphere of great and crowded halls, where the contagion of a multitude, expectant and sympathetic, acts like wine both upon speaker and audience. The latter is commonly neither profound in its knowledge nor fastidious in its taste. A broad humour, a little chaff, some claptrap, a spice of invective, and a resounding peroration are passports to the heart of the crowd. So it has been with the mobs and the mob orators of all countries and all times.

How different is the atmosphere of a Chamber where rules of debate and a measure of decorum have to be observed, where the audience, so far from clamouring for the speaker, is often surfeited with speeches and requires to be coaxed back to the meal, where an appeal has to be made to the understanding rather than to the emotions, where an emptying House may chill the courage of the boldest orator, and where the entire effect of his eloquence may be wiped out by a brilliant reply. Obviously we are speaking of two entirely different modes of expression, which call for separate gifts. The one represents a more cultured and exacting, the other an easier and broader, style.

Speakers who excel in both styles.

It is not denied that sometimes the gifts of the platform and the Parliamentary orator are combined in the same person in an extraordinary degree, and, in a few rare cases, that the performer so gifted has been able to maintain as high a standard at the mass meeting as in the House. Daniel O'Connell appears to me to have been the greatest mob orator that we have ever had in this country, and he also excelled in Parliament. Mirabeau, in France, possessed very similar gifts. Lamartine, at the Hotel de Ville, in Paris, in 1848, produced an instantaneous effect that few orators have surpassed. Mr. Gladstone was scarcely, if at all, inferior to O'Connell; Mr. Bright was a third. But in the two latter cases what appealed to the crowd would seem to have been not so much the rolling sentences, or the majestic mien of the orator, as the spectacle of righteous fervour, invoking the moral sense of the com-

munity to storm some citadel of ancestral privilege or to redress an unexpiated wrong.

Another difference between the modern fashion and that of our forefathers, and still more that of the ancient world, is the estimation in which extempore, as distinct from prepared, oratory is now held. I doubt if in reality the modern speaker prepares less, in fact the conditions of modern oratory, with the sleuth-hounds of the Press hanging upon the track of the speaker, and the electric telegraph waiting to convey his smallest lapse from sense or discretion to the world, almost compel him, if he is a leader, to prepare more; at least they compel him to be more careful about the *ipsissima verba* of his utterances. But the difference lies in this, that whereas the classic orator gloried in his preparation, and would have thought it a slur upon his art in any way to abate it, the modern speaker, with a false sense of shame, adopts every manner of artifice for hiding his studies, and seeks to convey the illusion of extemporaneous effort even where his subterfuge is belied by the obvious evidence of facts. We are familiar with the speaker who compresses his MS. or his notes into a small space in the palm of his hand, or as Mr. Bright was said to have done, even conceals them in his hat. We have all of us witnessed the ignominious breakdown of the speaker who has learned off his effort by heart, but whose memory fails him at the pinch. I have even heard a speaker commence a quotation which he said had occurred to him while on his feet, and only complete it with the aid of a slip of paper confusedly extracted from his pocket. In so far as these are the devices of unskilled practitioners they hardly call for attention here. But they are of importance in so far as they represent a mental attitude towards speaking which undoubtedly differs from that of former times. Mr. Balfour, for instance, represents the modern standpoint when he once said in an address:

Extempore speaking.

"No impromptu speech can have the finish, polish, or conscious arrangement which is the result of study. But the man who writes his speech, and then learns it, and then declaims it—*so that every man knows he has written it*—that man will never succeed as a speaker."

A good deal, of course, turns upon the exact application of the proviso which I have underlined. But even allowing for that, Mr. Balfour's dictum is conspicuously at variance with both the rules and the practice of the ancient world. All the greatest speeches of antiquity were prepared and learned off by heart, and the audience were perfectly conscious of the fact. The same is true of many at any rate of the masterpieces of post-classical oratory. Does anyone imagine that Abraham Lincoln improvised his Gettysburg oration—I happen to know that it was written out on a slip of paper in advance—or his second Inaugural Address? Many of the greatest efforts of the British eighteenth century orators were similarly committed to memory. Brougham wrote:

"The highest reaches of the art can only be attained by him who well considers and maturely prepares and oftentimes sedulously corrects and refines his oration."

The fact is that both methods are entirely legitimate, and each is capable of being the highest art. The choice lies in the occasion and the theme. The Parliamentary orator who has to deliver a panegyric upon a departed statesman would be foolish if he did not diligently and scrupulously prepare it. But the party leader who has to follow a rival leader in debate would be still more foolish, he would be grossly incompetent, if he relied upon preparation or trusted to memory.

In the golden age.

If we look back at the golden age of English eloquence we shall see the two streams flowing side by side, the one impetuous and uncontrolled, the other smooth and shining. Chatham at his best in extemporaneous outpouring—his panegyric on Wolfe universally condemned as a failure; Fox the same, weak in opening, ineffective in eulogy (for instance, his speech on the Duke of Bedford) but incomparable in reply; Pitt with an even and majestic flow that depended little upon notes; Burke capable of speaking grandly, though not to the enjoyment of his audience, without preparation, but devoting to his highest flights the most laborious toil; Windham

exquisite when unpremeditated, but leaving when he died the manuscript of an undelivered speech written out entirely in his own hand; Grattan, marvellous in both styles. Sheridan, on the other hand, preparing and learning everything, even his jokes;[1] Macaulay, writing out his great speeches, and repeating them—such was his almost miraculous memory—without the omission of a word; Brougham, redolent of the lamp; Canning always suggesting the actor and the rhetorician. Later on we shall see which method has been favoured by the great speakers of our time. But enough has been said to show that no distinction in merit can be laid down, while if it were, it would be at once discounted by the fact that the same speakers practise and excel in both.

Modern vogue.

That extemporaneous speaking, however, is now thought to be a higher form of the art appears to be certain from the plaudits that are lavished upon the successful rejoinder as compared with the most polished introduction, and from the attempts that are made to simulate it even by expert performers. Why this should be so, it is not altogether easy to say. Professor Jebb, in a bold generalisation, attributed it to the Hebraic basis of education in modern Christendom, which identifies the supreme afflatus with inspiration from above. I am inclined to think that the explanation is both more simple and less flattering. The number of those who can extemporise with power and brilliancy is always greatly inferior to the number of those who can compose and prepare; and men rate more highly the rarer attainment. Secondly, for the purpose of modern politics, the one is a much more serviceable asset than the other. The occasions of speech in our public life have so enormously multiplied, parliamentary business lies so much more in debate than in exposition, there is so little leisure on the part, either of speaker or of audience, for sustained display, that the speaker who can improvise has a great advantage

[1] When he died his note-books were found with the carefully prepared jokes in them which he intended to fire off (and in many cases had fired off) when the moment and the victim came.

over the speaker who requires notice. Perhaps also the one gift appears to connote sincerity, while the other suggests artifice. Nevertheless, behind all this lurks the solid and incontrovertible fact that on great occasions men still prepare and write out at length, and trust largely either to memory or to notes.

I have now summarised the principal characteristics that seem to me to differentiate the modern practice of public speech in this country from that of an earlier date. I have shown that the condition of the House of Commons, the education and life of members, the exigencies of the party system, the requirements of the constituencies, all tend insensibly to a lowering of the old standards and to the disparagement of speaking as an art. Perhaps there is in this state of affairs no more than an inevitable reflex of what is sometimes called the spirit of the age. It is a temper quick, impatient, practical, business-like, distrustful of periphrasis, scornful of superfluous embellishment, eager to arrive at the goal. Speed and directness have ousted leisure and circumambulation. Just as the steamer has superseded the sailing ship, the railway the stage-coach, the taxicab the hansom, and the motor the cart, so must the speaker get more quickly to his destination; he may not halt to drink at Pierian fountains or to wreathe his head with Delphian bay.

Forensic and ecclesiastical eloquence.

I am not sure that a similar decline is not observable in the two other great fields of British eloquence, the pulpit and the bar. It would take me far afield were I to attempt to investigate these phenomena this evening. But I suspect that the same causes, *mutatis mutandis*, are producing similar effects, and that the eloquence of a Mansfield or an Erskine, an Atterbury or a Wilberforce will be less and less likely to be evolved from the conditions of the future.

General level of speaking.

And yet, while admitting this decline in the highest level and anticipating its continuance, there are two opposing considerations which it is fair to name. The first is this, that while the highest

standard is lower than it was, the ordinary standard is higher. It cannot, I think, be doubted that though fewer speakers speak with the voice of angels than of yore, more speakers speak like intelligent men. In the House of Commons the general level of speech is certainly higher than it was fifty years ago—the direct consequence of the practice acquired on the platform and in the hard mill of contested elections. It is scarcely to be conceived that so wretched a speaker as Castlereagh could ever again lead the House of Commons—that he should have been preferred to the brilliant Canning is to this hour one of the puzzles of history. I doubt even whether the Duke of Wellington, who had no pretensions to be an orator, could be called either by the favour of the Sovereign or the confidence of the country to the presidency of an administration. The gift of speech in political leaders has become a greater necessity—it is really a condition of existence.

Influence of modern eloquence.

The second consideration is this, that though oratory may be shorn of much of its ancient reverence, the power of speech is in no wise dethroned. It still sits aloft and holds the keys of fortune in its lap. It may be that "fragments of the mighty voice" less often "come rolling on the wind"; but, with a humbler and less sonorous utterance, eloquence still sways the hearts of men and opens the doors to influence and power. The man who aspires to a seat on the Front Bench of the House of Commons will find his best passport in speech. A Cabinet Minister must be able to expound his policy and defend his department. The man who would lead the people and control the State may not perhaps succeed without character; but he will undoubtedly fail if he has not the gift of tongues. On the lower rungs of the political ladder it is in the debating society, at the street corner, in clubs, and on platforms that the ambitious artisan acquires the training which takes him from the secretaryship of his Union to the Town Council, from the latter to the House of Commons, and from the back benches to the front. Never was there a

time when power of speech was more sure of its reward. It might indeed be argued that it is a disproportionate reward, when we see the back places crowded by the often superior but unserviceable talents of the dumb.

I should also like to dispel the popular illusion that eloquence, even in the decline of the art, no longer affects votes in Parliament. It is certainly the case that, in the tightening of party bonds, it becomes increasingly difficult for a man to vote against his side, still more to be persuaded by the speech of a political opponent to do so; and the classical instances of a division turned by the speech of a Wilberforce (on the Melville case in 1806), a Plunket (on Catholic Emancipation in 1807) or a Macaulay (on the Copyright Bill in 1842, and again on the proposal to make the Master of the Rolls incapable of sitting in the House of Commons in 1853), are perhaps unlikely to be repeated. But in the House of Commons I have constantly seen votes affected by speeches, in this sense, that a policy which was regarded with grave doubt or suspicion has been acclaimed, either with or without a division, owing to the adroit or powerful defence of a Minister; that a successful attack on a policy or a plan has led to its abandonment, sooner than face the risks of the division lobby; or even, as in the case of the well-known speech of the late Lord Wolverhampton, then Mr. Fowler, in 1895, that anticipated defeat has been converted into overwhelming victory. Perhaps the most remarkable instance of such an oratorical triumph in modern times was the speech of Mr. Gladstone, when moving a vote of credit in the Russo-Afghan crisis of 1885. I trust, therefore, that no aspirant to a Parliamentary career, and no mourner over the bier of old-world eloquence, will be disheartened by the idea that we live in times when speech is merely a casual accomplishment, like the hitting of a golf ball, or a stroke at cricket, worthy, perhaps, of admiration, but destitute either of real merit or of authority. Such would be an absurd and misleading fallacy.

The effect on votes.

Rather do I look forward to a revival in the country of

eloquence in other and more popular shapes adjusted to the requirements of the times. Just as the oratory of the Georgian era was attuned to an aristocratic age, and that of the mid-Victorian epoch to middle-class ascendancy, so does it seem to me likely that the democracy will produce an eloquence, perhaps even an oratory, of its own. Should a man arise from the ranks of the people, as did Abraham Lincoln from the backwoods of America, a man gifted with real oratorical power and with commanding genius, I can see no reason why he should not renew in England the glories of a Chatham or a Grattan. His triumphs might be less in the Senate than in the arena: his style might not be that of the classics of the past. But he might by reason of his gifts climb to the topmost place where he would sway the destinies of the State and affect the fortunes of an Empire. Symptoms of such a power and style are sometimes visible in the declamations of Mr. Lloyd George, who, to a student of history, is a curious compound of the brothers Tiberius and Caius Gracchus, with a strong flavour of the Athenian demagogue thrown in, and when emotionally aroused, either by the misdeeds of his opponents or the sufferings of the poor, has a great command of dramatic or melodramatic effect. But this style of speech requires to be purified of much dross before it can be certified as fine gold. In the House of Commons some of the Labour Members are eloquent speakers, notably Mr. Philip Snowden and Mr. Ramsay Macdonald.

Possible revival of eloquence in a democracy.

Mr. Lloyd George.

From these general considerations I will pass on to consider the individual speakers of renown who have been produced under the conditions which I have described, and of whose oratorical abilities I will attempt to give some estimate.

Individual orators or speakers.

By far the greatest orator whom I personally heard in the House of Commons—indeed almost the only orator—was Mr. Gladstone. I sat in Parliament with him for eight years. I had the honour of preceding him, and the still greater honour

W. E. Gladstone.

of being followed by him, in debate. Before I obtained a seat in the House I had frequently listened to him from the Gallery. Although he had nearly reached the age of seventy years at the time of which I speak, and was almost the sole survivor of a generation of giants that had passed away, his strength was not abated nor his eloquence dimmed. I heard him introduce the first Home Rule Bill in a speech three-and-a-half hours in length, I heard all his great speeches on both Home Rule Bills, and every considerable speech during the last decade of his Parliamentary life. I even heard him propose a toast at a wedding breakfast.

While this great and famous figure was in the House of Commons the House had eyes for no other person. His movements on the bench, restless and eager, his demeanour when on his legs, whether engaged in answering a simple question, expounding an intricate Bill, or thundering in vehement declamation, his dramatic gestures, his deep and rolling voice with its wide compass and marked northern accent, his flashing eye, his almost incredible command of ideas and words, made a combination of irresistible fascination and power. We who sat opposite him in his later years saw in him the likeness, now of an old eagle, fearless in his gaze and still exultant in his strength, now of some winged creature of prey, swooping down upon a defenceless victim, now of a tiger, suddenly aroused from his lair and stalking abroad in his anger. Mr. Gladstone seemed to me to be master of every art of eloquence and rhetoric. He could be passionate or calm, solemn or volatile, lucid or involved, grave or humorous (with a heavy sort of banter), persuasive or denunciatory, pathetic or scornful, at will. It is true that his copiousness was sometimes overpowering and his subtlety at moments almost Satanic.[1]

[1] Mr. Gladstone's extreme subtlety was the source of a popular joke at his expense during the visit of Garibaldi to London in 1864. The marked attentions of a noble widow to Garibaldi having suggested that she had matrimonial intentions, it was objected that the Italian patriot was already married, whereupon the ready answer was made, "Oh, he must get Gladstone to explain her away."

It was then that one understood Disraeli's bitter phrase about the "sophistical rhetorician inebriated with the exuberance of his own verbosity," or Mr. Forster's sardonic remark, "The right hon. gentleman can persuade other people of almost anything, he can persuade himself of absolutely anything." I recall a phrase of that incorrigible cynic Labouchere, alluding to Mr. Gladstone's frequent appeals to a higher power, that he did not object to the old man always having a card up his sleeve, but he did object to his insinuating that the Almighty had placed it there. I remember, too, how sensitive he was to attack, how easily drawn, how lacking in proportion in his treatment of smaller men and things. These were the foibles of a great intellect, the antithesis to transcendant powers. But they did not obscure the general impression of a noble personality, aglow with ardour, and magnificent in courage.

His greatest speeches.

Among the earlier speeches of Mr. Gladstone, long before my day, I have always thought one of the finest was that delivered on the second reading of the abortive Reform Bill of 1866, when he quoted from the Æneid, as to his reception by the Liberal Party, and concluded with the words:

"The banner which we now carry in this fight, though perhaps at some moment it may droop over our sinking heads, soon again will float in the eye of heaven, and will be borne by the firm hands of the united people of the three kingdoms, perhaps not to an easy, but to a certain and a not far distant victory."

But according to Mr. Balfour and other authorities cited by Lord Morley, the peroration of the speech about Montenegro and Bulgaria in May, 1877, must have been a not inferior deliverance. In the latter part of Mr Gladstone's life the speech to which all who heard it gave the palm was the speech on April 26th, 1880, on the Affirmation Bill, introduced to deal with the case of Mr. Bradlaugh. In this speech occurred the famous quotation from Lucretius to which I have before referred; but the passage in which it was enshrined was one that no other living Parliamentarian could have spoken, and that touched the highest point of exalted sentiment and intellectual reasoning. Few of those who heard it could follow the

argument; fewer still understood the Latin. But there was a silence as in a church, and a feeling as though the air was fanned by invisible wings. In the Home Rule Debate of 1886, I recall especially the speech in which Mr. Gladstone concluded the debate on introducing the Bill, and which contained the celebrated phrase about "a double dose of original sin," and the speech which immediately preceded the defeat of the Government on the second reading, culminating in a marvellous peroration.

That Mr. Gladstone was a supreme orator there can, I think, be no doubt. There was no resource of oratory intellectual, emotional or external, that was not at his command. But that he was an orator to be heard, rather than to be read, is a commonplace. If we take up now the two volumes of the Midlothian Speeches in 1879 and 1880, we feel, in Tom Moore's words—

> "like one
> Who treads alone
> Some banquet hall deserted,
> Whose lights are fled,
> Whose garlands dead,
> And all but he departed."

So difficult is it to believe that these interminable and involved harangues were the spell that stirred the heart of an entire nation, upset a powerful minister, and carried the speaker to the pinnacle of power.

And yet that Mr. Gladstone was no less great as a platform orator than he was in the House of Commons is evident from this as from innumerable other experiences. But his triumph on the platform, which appears to have become greater as he advanced in years, was the triumph of a moral force quite as much as of an eloquent tongue.

His methods.

It seems to be supposed, from Mr. Gladstone's incomparable fertility of utterance and readiness in reply, that he never prepared his speeches in advance. This is a mistake. Like all great orators, he made careful preparation when this was due to the occasion.[1] He wrote down and he even learned off

[1] The notes of many scores of his speeches are preserved at Hawarden.

his perorations; and from my place in the Gallery of the House, in April, 1886, I could distinctly see the MS., in his own handwriting, of the entire concluding sentences of his speech in introducing the first Home Rule Bill.

I recall some other personal characteristics of this great orator. In earlier days he was described as standing while speaking, with his hands clasped behind his back. I never saw him in this position. His gestures in speech were astonishing in their variety and freedom. He would lean on the table with his right elbow, and point his finger in scorn at the object of his invective or attack. He would smite his right hand on the open palm of his left hand with resounding blows. He would bang the table and the box on it with his clenched fist. On one occasion I saw his hand descend heavily upon the gilded mace. He had a habit of swinging right round and appealing to his supporters, while all that we who were opposite could see was his bald cranium and streaming white hair. Another extraordinary and probably unconscious trick, while he was unfolding an argument, was that of scratching the top of his scalp with the extended thumb of his right hand. On the other hand, the enormous collars with which *Punch* insisted on investing him were nothing more than the conventional dress of the mid-Victorian epoch. On great occasions he always appeared with a flower in his button-hole; and if a long speech were in prospect we all of us knew the little pomatum-bottle with its mixture of beaten egg and sherry, which was half hidden behind the brass-bound box.[1] Such are a few fugitive recollections of the greatest man who sat in the House of Commons in my time, and of the foremost orator of the last half-century.

His gestures.

His great rival Disraeli I saw in both Houses of Parliament. Though he was a master of picturesque and incisive phraseology, though many passages in his long-sustained vendetta with Peel in the years 1845–6, which can be read in the

B. Disraeli.

[1] He explained its virtues to Lord Morley in these terms: "It stimulates, it lubricates."

second volume of Monypenny's *Life*, are almost unequalled in the annals of Parliamentary invective, and though a few, like the comparison of the Liberal Government at Manchester in April, 1872, to a range of exhausted volcanoes on the South American coast, belong to English literature, I always heard from those who remembered Disraeli even in his prime that he was not an orator either by nature or art. Many of his speeches, particularly in earlier times, were bombastic and dreary; and he did not, except in later years, when wrapped in the prestige of his triumphant career, easily place himself in touch with his audience. But there was an air of expectancy whenever he spoke: men were on the look-out for the jewelled phrase, the exquisite epigram, the stinging sneer. He was like the conjurer on a platform, whose audience with open mouths awaited the next trick. Now and then he soared to genuine eloquence, as when, in April, 1865, in an atmosphere of breathless silence, he passed a eulogium of unusual simplicity on Mr. Cobden, and described him as one of those members of Parliament "who, though not present in the body, are still members of this House, independent of dissolutions, of the caprice of constituencies, even of the course of time."

In both Chambers Mr. Disraeli's characteristic pose was that of a statuesque and Sphinx-like immobility on the bench. I have seen him sitting hour after hour while Mr. Gladstone or some other opponent was thundering at him, motionless, with his arms crossed, his eyes apparently closed, and not a flicker of emotion on his pallid countenance. Sometimes he would murmur a word to Lord John Manners or an old friend. An illustration of his sardonic and disconcerting method was told me by my uncle, Sir Wilfrid Lawson; it was the occasion when, Mr. Gladstone having more than once repeated the phrase "The Right Hon. Gentleman and his satellites," and having then paused or momentarily lost the thread of his argument, Disraeli rose and amid a hushed House remarked in dulcet tones, "the last word was satellites!"

I heard his speech in the House of Lords on the Afghan

War in December, 1878, and I recall the peroration in which, raising his hollow voice and waving his hand, he called upon his hearers to brand the Peace at any Price doctrines—"these dogmas, these deleterious dogmas, with the reprobation of the Peers of England." When he left the House for the division the Peers waited while he walked out alone at the head of his party. He also came back alone at the head of the procession and took his solitary place on the bench; and, when a young and frisky Peer who had dined somewhat too well went up in a genial mood to have a word with his leader, and almost sat down on the top of him, from the steps of the throne I could hear the startled statesman emit, with what he himself once styled a superb groan, the sepulchral ejaculation "My dear Lord!"

His phrases.

It is evident that Disraeli's phrases were carefully prepared and committed to memory, whether delivered from the platform or in the House. He was in truth a rhetorician rather than an orator, an actor in the guise of a politician. It was as a phrasemonger that his greatest rhetorical triumphs were won: organised hypocrisy; plundering and blundering; England does not love coalitions; tea-kettle precedents; *sanitas sanitatum*; juvenile and curly; mass in masquerade; on the side of the angels; Batavian grace; peace with honour; *imperium et libertas*; the key of India is London. All of these are taken from his speeches; his novels contain a thousand other illustrations.

His manner and dress.

In earlier days Disraeli wore the fanciful dress of the dandy of the period, and his gestures were in harmony with his costume. He would pull down his waistcoat, put his hands in his pockets and hook his fingers in his armholes, while speaking. I once as a boy saw him in the House of Commons dressed in a black velvet coat and check trousers, an almost incredible garb for a modern Prime Minister. It was in a black velvet shooting coat and a wide-awake hat that he strolled into the Sheldonian Theatre at Oxford in 1874 and informed the astonished

parsons of the Oxford Diocese that he was "on the side of the angels." But in the House of Lords he always wore a frock coat buttoned across his chest, and a black tie. He indulged in little gesticulation, but at critical moments, when leading up to a phrase or a peroration, he would extract a handkerchief from his coat-tails and wave it with a slight flourish in the air. In those later days his once ambrosial locks had lost their curl: a single twist alone adorned his brow; his thinning hair was protected by the art of the dyer from the final ravages of time. As an Oxford undergraduate I attended his funeral at Hughenden. I recall the profound and unfavourable impression created by the absence of Mr. Gladstone, but this omission was more than rectified by the magnanimous tribute paid to his memory a few days later by his great survivor in the House of Commons.

John Bright.

I was a member of the Lower House for a short time with Mr. Bright, but I only once heard him speak, and that in a commonplace manner. That he was a great orator in the class of those who carefully prepare their choicest sentences and regard a speech as a work of art, is certain. In fact he was the most conspicuous violation of Mr. Balfour's canon which I have before quoted; for every one knew that his beautiful passages were learned in advance, and he made no secret of it himself; and yet, whether at a popular gathering or in the House, he was unquestionably one of the few of whom it might be said, in Mr. Gladstone's splendid phrase, that what he received from his audiences in vapour he poured back upon them in flood.

One of the secrets of Mr. Bright's eloquence was his unique command of happy and almost colloquial simile, the apposite stories that he told, and his ready wit. Nature had assisted him with a good presence, action simple and unaffected (his biographer says that he had no gesture beyond the raising of his hand), and a melodious voice.

But the real clue to his power lay in the personality and moral attributes of the man, and in the nature of the causes

for which he pleaded. Though it is no part of the business of an orator to mount a pulpit, John Bright preached to his countrymen with the fervour of a Savonarola and the simplicity of a Wesley. Many of his illustrations (*e.g.* the Shunammite woman and the cave of Adullam) were drawn from the Bible, which he was said to know better than any other book. In general literature he was not deeply versed, nor did he give any evidence of a wide knowledge or profound reasoning. There can never have been any speaker who more successfully practised the maxim *Ars est celare artem*. Though he was known to shut himself up for days before he delivered a great speech, when he was inaccessible even to his family, though his purple passages, as they would now be called, were committed to memory[1] and his perorations written down, neither his manner nor his diction suggested artifice, while his high character and patent sincerity opened the door of every heart. I will not repeat here the well-known passages from his most famous orations, but I will give one extract only from the speech that he made at a public breakfast given to William Lloyd Garrison, the American abolitionist, in June, 1867—a speech that was thought by many of his friends to have been the highest achievement of his art.

"Then came the outbreak which had been so often foretold, so often menaced; and the ground reeled under the nation during four years of agony, until at last, after the smoke of the battlefield had cleared away, the horrid shape which had cast its shadow over a whole Continent had vanished, and was gone for ever. An ancient and renowned poet has said

'Unholy is the voice
Of loud thanksgiving over slaughtered men.'

It becomes us not to rejoice, but to be humbled, that a chastisement so terrible should have fallen upon any of our race; but we may be thankful for this—that this chastisement at least was not sent in vain. The great triumph in the field was not all; there came after it another great triumph, a triumph over passion; and there came up before the world the spectacle, not of armies or military commanders, but of the magnanimity and mercy of a powerful and victorious nation."

[1] He told Mr. George Russell that his method of constructing a speech was to divide his subject into compartments, to each of which he supplied what he called an island, *i.e.* a carefully prepared key sentence. Then he would swim from island to island, until he landed on the best island of all, which was, of course, the peroration.

By the side of this may be placed the passage, tremendous in its dramatic simplicity, in one of John Bright's Crimean War speeches, in December, 1854, in which—referring to a fellow M.P., an officer, whom he had met at Hyde Park Corner and who had remarked that it was no light matter for a man with a wife and five little children to be ordered off to the war—he suddenly added: "The stormy Euxine is his grave, his wife is a widow, his children fatherless."

Duke of Argyll.

I recall another contemporary and colleague of Mr. Gladstone who also deserved the name of orator. This was the Duke of Argyll, father of the present holder of the title. Mr. Gladstone once told me that the finest speaker he had ever heard in the House of Lords was Lord Ellenborough, that ill-balanced and tempestuous person, who was both Governor-General of India and President of the Board of Control. But at other times he appears to have said the same thing of the Duke of Argyll. Lord Ellenborough was before my day, but I frequently heard the Duke. He spoke with perfect ease, with grace of gesture, with felicity of diction, and with intellectual power. Though short of stature, he had an almost leonine appearance: and his hair stood up from his lofty forehead like the plume in a Highlander's bonnet. A somewhat haughty manner, combined with this appearance, and a rather didactic tone, caused Bishop Wilberforce to christen him Cocculus Indicus.[1] But though his oratorical talents were obscured by an omniscience that is the greatest disability from which a public man can suffer, and were for the most part confined for their exercise to the Upper Chamber, there can be no doubt that the Duke possessed many of the attributes of the real orator. His methods, as his son has informed me, were these: he always carefully put down the heads of his speech in due order in columns on a sheet of note-paper—but nothing more. He never wrote out passages, nor did he quote or declaim them after delivery. His voice was one of singular beauty. There is a general consensus that the finest speech, or at least the finest passage

[1] He was Secretary of State for India.

in a speech, made by him was in the debate on the second reading of the Home Rule Bill of 1893, when he had finally severed himself from his former chief. Answering Mr. Gladstone's argument that the Bill was inevitable, he thus addressed the Lords (September 6th, 1893):

"Inevitable! Why I have been spending the last few weeks in a part of Scotland where we look down on the hills of Antrim. We can see the colour of their fields, and in the sunset we can see the glancing of the light upon the windows of the cabins of the people. This is the country, I thought the other day, when I looked on the scene—this is the country which the greatest English statesman tells us must be governed as we govern the Hindoos. Was there ever such folly?"

Sir William Harcourt.

Sir William Harcourt, as a speaker, was in some respects the survival of an earlier day. It may be suspected that he also took Disraeli, for whom he had a great admiration, as a model: for there was the same elaborate preparation and polished sarcasm in the efforts of both. Harcourt had many advantages as a speaker: a commanding presence, a classical style, a caustic humour, considerable erudition, and a wide knowledge of affairs. I heard him make many powerful speeches, but he was not naturally eloquent. I doubt if he ever moved an audience either to deep feeling or to tears—which might serve as a definition of oratory;[1] and he failed to convince his hearers of sincerity or conviction—an impression which was encouraged by some of the circumstances of his political career. In satire, raillery, and scorn, not always highly refined, he was proficient. I remember calling upon him once in his rooms at Cambridge, where he was Professor of International Law, in 1879. He handed me a copy of a speech in this vein which he had just delivered at Southport in Lancashire—a place I was later to represent in Parliament—with the remark: "That speech will make me Home Secretary in the next Administration"—and so it did. Though he was very effective in improvised retort, —more so I think than when prepared—he became in

[1] It may be recalled that Alcibiades said of Socrates that Pericles and the other great Attic orators were not to be compared with him, because "the voice of Socrates made his heart leap within him as that of a Corybantian reveller, and his eyes rain tears."—PLATO, *Sympos.* 215.

later years so much a slave to his MS., that he lost all appearance of spontaneity. His speech would lie on the box in front of him, page piled on page, and when he visited the country for platform orations, a special desk was sent down in advance to accommodate his voluminous MS. His literary knowledge gave a fine flavour to his speeches, and he made by far the best adaptation of a quotation that I heard in the House of Commons. This was on an occasion when a splendid and courtly country gentleman of the old school—Sir R. Knightley—had been making a speech, in which he touched on his own long and distinguished ancestry. In replying, Harcourt parodied the well-known verse of Addison about the moon :—

> "And (K)nightly to the listening earth
> Repeats the story of his birth."

On the other hand he was exceedingly angry on another occasion when some rival wit applied to him Pope's famous line about the Monument of London, which

> "Like a tall bully rears its head—and lies."

The speaker halted when he came to the last word of the quotation, which was drowned amid the uproarious cheers of the House.

I pass from these historic figures of bygone Liberalism to consider some of the foremost men on the opposite side.

Marquis of Salisbury.

Lord Salisbury was at all times in his remarkable career a speaker of outstanding importance ; outstanding because of his powerful and penetrating intellect, his mordant humour, and his literary skill. That a man could possess and exercise so unusual a literary gift without incurring the faintest suspicion of being a rhetorician is a proof of his supreme indifference to the orator's arts. For these he had neither the equipment nor the inclination. He cared nothing for the platform ; he made no conscious effort to attract or to conciliate his hearers ; he was invariably thinking of his subject rather than of them. In most of the attributes that we have hitherto associated with the orator

he was wholly wanting. And yet he was one of the most fascinating, and in his later days one of the most impressive, speakers to whom it was possible to listen. Whether in the House of Lords, or at a Lord Mayor's banquet, or at a public meeting, he appeared to suggest embodied wisdom; he was the philosopher meditating aloud. It seemed a mere accident that the reflection was conducted audibly and in public rather than in the recesses of the library at Hatfield. His massive head, bowed upon his chest, his precise and measured tones, his total absence of gesture, his grave but subtle irony, sustained the illusion. It was only when the epigrams flashed forth, and the extraordinary felicity of diction overcame the barriers of reserve, that the cheers rattled along the absorbed and silent benches.

No powerful speaker was ever less dependent on aids to memory or indeed on preparation. Before a great harangue he would arrange his thoughts in the solitude of his study or during a walk in the open air. But he neither made nor required notes. I was with him as one of his Private Secretaries on the occasion of his visit to Newport in November, 1885, to deliver the battle cry in the impending electoral campaign. He spoke for one-and-three-quarter hours in a vast hall without a single note but an extract from a speech by Mr. Chamberlain, written on a card in his pocket.

Evolution of his character.

The evolution of the statesman is as interesting a study as that of the great painter. We can usually trace Period I, Period II, and Period III, according to the influences under which he has passed or the natural development of his own powers of character and mind. Thus we pass in the case of Mr. Gladstone from the hope of the stern and unbending Tories through intervening phases to the darling of democratic Liberalism; in the case of Disraeli from the dandified political adventurer to the awe-inspiring voice of an Empire. No such change or evolution of political opinion marked the career of Lord Salisbury. But the change of temper and tone was not less remarkable, converting the "master

of gibes and flouts and sneers," the bitter speaker, whose "invective lacked finish," into the mellowed and majestic statesman, cautious in his policy, philosophic in his mental outlook, imposing in his reserve. In the course of this transition, the faculty of epigram, which was too deeply rooted in him to be seriously modified, and which made his private conversation a perpetual delight, expended itself in the "blazing indiscretions" for which he attained a notoriety that amused no one more than himself. These were entirely unpremeditated; and I remember being with him for a Birmingham demonstration, before which he declared that on this occasion at least he would not offend, only to perpetrate a few hours later one of his most characteristic indiscretions.

Duke of Devonshire.

A speaker who was equally deficient in the arts of oratory, and even more indifferent to applause, but who attained a position of scarcely inferior influence in the State was the late Duke of Devonshire. When he was first made an Under Secretary in 1863, the appointment was looked upon as a Whig job, and almost an affront to the House of Commons. That a speaker so ungainly in manner, so unready of speech, and so casual in temperament, should also be the eldest son of a Duke, was thought to aggravate the crime. And yet this leisure-loving man, who always preferred Newmarket to the House of Commons, who hated making a speech, and regarded politics as a disagreeable necessity of his order, rose by his robust and steadfast common sense, his incorruptible honesty, and the splendid tenacity with which he defended and expounded his convictions, to be one of the most powerful and persuasive speakers in either House of Parliament. In the Debate upon the Introduction of the first Home Rule Bill in 1886, to which I have before referred, by far the best speech, greatly transcending that of the trained orator Mr. Gladstone, was delivered by Lord Hartington. No hesitation or drowsiness marred the utterance of the man who felt his most sacred convictions outraged and betrayed. Sincerity and a *sæva indignatio* endowed him with a

noble eloquence, and when he resumed his seat, I recall that members stood up and waved their hats in the air. In a subsequent career of singular unselfishness and inflexible courage he was called upon to make similar pronouncements on many occasions. He thus became the recognised mouthpiece of the sober sense of the community, and his speeches were more widely read than those of any other public man; for they both formed and expressed public opinion. The British Parliament has probably never contained a statesman who with fewer of the orator's gifts was more successful in producing the effect which even the orator sometimes fails to attain.

One of the remarkable features of the speaking of this upright man was his extreme nervousness. I have seen his sheet of notes shaking in his hands as he spoke, and I recall that when I was sworn in to the Privy Council at Windsor, and the Duke, as President of the Council, had to read out the names to Queen Victoria from a big sheet of paper or parchment, his hands trembled so violently that he all but dropped the list.

Lord Randolph Churchill.

And now I pass to two very opposite figures, who both attained to high fame by their proficiency in the combined arts of Parliamentary and democratic eloquence. I speak of Lord Randolph Churchill and Mr. Chamberlain. Churchill's meteoric career and tragic ending call for no mention here. It is as a speaker alone that I propose to consider him. I can speak from personal recollection of his performances both in Parliament and in the country. I heard many of the personal attacks upon Mr. Gladstone and the Liberal Government, and, perhaps, scarcely less upon the respectable persons who then led the Conservative party, by means of which he hewed his way to fame. The tomahawk was always in his hand. It is impossible to describe the gleeful ferocity with which he swept off the scalps of friend and foe. Some of these speeches contained the grossest errors of taste, and nearly all were marked by a vein of almost burlesque exaggeration. In later times, however,

he led the House of Commons for a few weeks with unquestionable brilliance, and some of his speeches showed a rapidly-growing sense of responsibility and great constructive power. His manner, like his speeches, revelled in contrast, alternating from extreme insolence to sweet reasonableness and an engaging courtesy. Like Disraeli, on whom he clearly modelled himself, he oscillated between the adventurer and the statesman. He spoke with a voice resonant, but not musical, from copious notes, and often committed large portions of his speech to memory. He gesticulated much with his hands; the fierce twirling of his moustache and his protruding eye were favourite themes with the political caricaturist. Seated behind him in the House when he delivered the speech in which he explained his fatal resignation, in the winter of 1886, I could observe the extreme nervousness betrayed by his restless movements and twitching fingers.

As a mob-orator.

It was as a mob-orator that Randolph Churchill excelled; no speaker of our day was for a few years such a popular hero. The effrontery with which he assailed accepted idols, his mastery of a rather coarse but pungent humour, his racy sallies, his use of large-sounding phrases in the Disraelian manner, and the belief that he was the prophet of a new political creed, which was permanently to attach the democracy to the Tory Party, combined to make him the darling of the crowd. I remember asking one of his Birmingham supporters the reason of his amazing popularity. "We like our liquors neat," was the reply, "and Randolph gives 'em us d——d neat." The speech at Blackpool in January, 1884, which contained the picture of Mr. Gladstone as the feller of trees, culminating in the immortal sentence "The forest laments that Mr. Gladstone may perspire," and followed by the not too happy political apologue about Chips, is perhaps the best specimen of his platform manner. It is interesting to know that the majority of these speeches were written out in advance, quickly learned (for Randolph Churchill included among his gifts a marvellous memory), and even sent before delivery to the

Morning Post, which to the end remained faithful to his fortunes.

What would have become of Churchill's power of speech is as difficult to conjecture as what would have happened to his career. The fluidity of his principles and his love for bold experiments and dramatic conceptions might have landed him ultimately in any camp, or in none. But that his oratorical gifts—though he was not in any sense an orator—might have grown into a weapon of enormous efficacy and power in the State, is no extravagant hypothesis.

Joseph Chamberlain.

Mr. Chamberlain is another illustration of great talents, equally effective in the Senate and on the platform. In the House of Commons he never aimed at oratory, he made no soaring flights of imagination or rhetoric; he neither received nor transmitted the divine spark. But for mastery of all the arts of debate, clearness, conciseness, humour, invective, ridicule, cogent and relentless reasoning, he was unsurpassed. And on the platform his strokes went straight to the mark, whether in the hearts of his audience or on the weak spot of the enemy. It is hard to say whether he was more effective as a demagogue, waging fierce war against privilege and monopoly, or as the patriot preaching with burning enthusiasm the gospel of Empire. The gift which impressed me most in his speaking was his imperturbable self-possession. An incident occurred in the introductory debate on the first Home Rule Bill in 1886, when Mr. Chamberlain, in the midst of a powerful declamation, was suddenly interrupted by Mr. Gladstone and forbidden to disclose a Cabinet secret. Where the composure and the argument of any ordinary man would have been fatally shattered by the suddenness of the blow, Mr. Chamberlain recovered himself in a moment, shifted the ground of his argument, and proceeded with the unerring precision of a machine. His best speeches gave evidence of careful preparation, and were assisted by neatly arranged notes. He only indulged sparingly in gesture, but his crisp and

penetrating intonation was an equally admirable vehicle for close reasoning or for withering scorn.

John Morley.

John Morley, the present Lord Morley of Blackburn, should be mentioned here, not as an orator, for he would make no such claim, but as the last or almost the last exponent of the classical literary style. Just as his great Biography of Mr. Gladstone teems with splendid phrases, original without being extravagant, imaginative without being ornate, so in some of his platform speeches, delivered in the days when he addressed great popular audiences, the principles of his political creed were expounded in a garb that reminds one of the school of literary orators that ended with Canning and Macaulay. It was not rhetoric, because the sense was never sacrificed to the form, but it was an inspired form of spoken prose. Sometimes—but less often—in the House of Commons he performed a similar feat. I quote one passage only, as a model of fine phrasing, from a speech delivered on the South African War in May, 1901. A striking passage in the earlier part of this speech about "a hateful war, a war insensate and infatuated, a war of uncompensated mischief and irreparable wrong," was followed by this peroration :

"The master-key of the prosperity and strength of the realm is peace. Peace means low taxes, reduced rent, advancement in the comfort and well-being of the people of these islands, and, what I do not, will not, disregard—it means the goodwill of the world. If our aim is the extension of our territorial dominion, the transformation of our ancient realm, which has aided civilisation for generation after generation, into a boastful military Empire, to be supported, I suppose, by conscription and a Customs Union thrown in, which will lose us our best markets for the sake of the worst, then, I say, financial ruin undoubtedly awaits us. I quote a sentence from a great divine which I have used before: 'Things are what they are, and their consequences will be what they will be. Why, then, shall we seek to deceive ourselves?' Wear out your coal, pile up your debts, multiply and magnify your responsibilities in every part of the globe, starve social reforms among your people at home ; and then, indeed, you will have a Little England, a dilapidated heritage to hand on to your children and your children's children."

I pass to the three living statesmen who have been Prime Ministers. We may be sure, from what has been

said, that none of them could have attained to or have held that office without exceptional powers of speech, although it would be impossible to name a trio of men who represented greater varieties of equipment and style.

Earl of Rosebery.

Lord Rosebery is frequently and not inaptly described as our only Orator, and as the Orator of Empire, the latter a tribute to the rich imagination and stately diction with which, on great occasions, he speaks for the nation, or expounds an imperial theme. There is hardly a gift predicable of the orator with which nature or study has not endowed Lord Rosebery; a voice flexible and resonant rather than melodious, gestures, bold and dramatic, perhaps even at times histrionic, a diction both chaste and resplendent, an exhaustive knowledge of all that is pertinent in literature or history, an exuberant fancy, great natural wit, a gift of persiflage, sometimes almost too generously indulged. I speak with less confidence as to passion and pathos, since it is an oratory that produces every sensation of admiration, amusement, and delight, without as a rule appealing either to profound emotion or to tears. A tendency may be traced in some speeches to exaggeration of effect.

Range of his eloquence.

If the range of Lord Rosebery's eloquence during the last forty years be examined, it will be found, I think, that he has exceeded any public man during that period in the number of speeches that he has delivered, which may claim to be both oratory from the effect produced on their audiences at the time, and literature, to judge by the enjoyment with which they may be read afterwards. His eloquence has poured over the ordinary boundaries of the political arena, has filled innumerable channels of historical, biographical, social, or literary interest, and has fertilised many and diverse fields. Whatever subject he touches is raised at once out of the commonplace: it is gilded with happy phrases, it sparkles with effervescence and laughter, and it becomes a part of the intellectual capital of the

whole community. It was with a cry of universal dismay that the nation heard the other day the surely unpardonable threat that it is perhaps to be deprived in the future of this gratuitous and unalloyed enjoyment.

Passages quoted.

There are at least a score of Lord Rosebery's speeches from which I might find quotations worthy to take their place in any company. The most widely popular and admired which he has delivered in recent years was his welcome to the members of the Imperial Press Conference in London, in June, 1909, in which occurred that exquisite passage about English scenery: "the little villages clustered, as they have clustered for centuries, about the heaven-directed spires."

But I prefer to select passages from two speeches, both delivered in St. Andrew's Hall at Glasgow, a place and a city for which Lord Rosebery has reserved some of his choicest gifts.

The first is his peroration, in July, 1896, on the frailties of Robert Burns:

"Man, after all, is not ripened by virtue alone. Were it so, this world were a paradise of angels. No. Like the growth of the earth, he is the fruit of all seasons, the accident of a thousand accidents, a living mystery moving through the seen to the unseen; he is sown in dishonour; he is matured under all the varieties of heat and cold; in mists and water, in snow and vapours, in the melancholy of autumn, in the torpor of winter, as well as in the rapture and fragrance of summer, or the balmy affluence of spring, its breath, its sunshine; at the end he is reaped, the produce not of one climate, but of all, not of good alone, but of sorrow, perhaps mellowed and ripened, perhaps stricken and withered and sour. How then shall we judge anyone—how, at any rate, shall we judge a giant, great in gifts and great in temptations, great in strength and great in weakness? Let us glory in his strength and be comforted in his weakness, and when we thank Heaven for the inestimable gift of Burns, we do not need to remember wherein he was imperfect, we cannot bring ourselves to regret that he was made of the same clay as ourselves."

The second passage is the peroration of his Rectorial Address at Glasgow University in 1900, on the British Empire:—

"How marvellous it all is! Built not by saints and angels, but the work of men's hands; cemented with men's honest blood and with a world of tears; welded by the best brains of centuries past; not without

the taint and reproach incidental to all human work, but constructed on the whole with pure and splendid purpose. Human, and not wholly human, for the most heedless and the most cynical must see the finger of the Divine. Growing as trees grow, while others slept; fed by the faults of others as well as by the character of our fathers; reaching with the ripple of a resistless tide over tracts and islands and continents, until our little Britain woke up to find herself the foster-mother of nations and the source of united empires. Do we not hail in this less the energy and fortune of a race than the supreme direction of the Almighty? Shall we not, while we adore the blessing, acknowledge the responsibility? And while we see, far away in the rich horizons, growing generations fulfilling the promise, do we not own with resolution mingled with awe the honourable duty incumbent on ourselves? Shall we then falter or fail? The answer is not doubtful. We will rather pray that strength may be given us, adequate and abundant, to shrink from no sacrifice in the fulfilment of our mission; that we may be true to the high tradition of our forefathers; and that we may transmit their bequest to our children, aye, and please God, to their remote descendants, enriched and undefiled, this blessed and splendid dominion."

Both these passages were doubtless written; for all I know they may have been read; but whether they were written, or read, or declaimed, they seem to me worthy to be ranked with the greatest masterpieces of British eloquence.

Mr. Balfour would be greatly shocked if any such claim were put forward on his behalf as I have made for some of the statesmen whom I have been discussing.

A. J. Balfour.

Indeed, I expect that he would disagree with much of what I have written about oratory and eloquence; for there has probably never been a statesman of the first rank in England who was so indifferent to either, or so distrustful of their influence in public life. Not that Mr. Balfour would be slow to recognise the supreme gifts either of Mr. Gladstone or Lord Rosebery—he has testified to the one, and I think to both—but his own idea of the best speech-making, I expect, would be that the thought is all important, and that the form, which is accidental, temperamental, and secondary, may be left to look after itself. I am confident that he has never consciously cultivated a single rhetorical art, and it can only have been by mistake if he has ever strayed into a peroration.

Mr. Balfour can perhaps afford to take this line, for

intellect has supplied him with that which a natural aptitude or conscious training has given to others. His is probably the acutest mind that has been dedicated to politics during the past century. As a parliamentary dialectician he has never had a superior; and his facility is such that in any field where his rare elevation of thought finds natural scope, he runs the risk of becoming eloquent in spite of himself. I recall his first speeches as Irish Secretary twenty-six years ago. They were both ineffective and hesitating. Even now he sometimes finds difficulty in getting under way, and his indifference to precision or detail is apt to be a source of embarrassment. But if any issue arises which requires to be resolved into broad principles, and to be handled by the thinker rather than the politician, the statesman rather than the party man, the House of Commons may look to him with confidence to express its highest ideals. No parliamentary speaker has ever had greater charm of manner or courtesy of address, and the way in which, in 1906–7, he won back the confidence of a new House of Commons, overpoweringly hostile to his political opinions, and distrustful of his dialectical methods, was a triumph without a parallel.

As a dialectician.

Mr. Balfour is probably more independent of preparation than any man who has ever led the House of Commons, When he spoke of placing his views on the Fiscal Question on half a sheet of note paper, he described that which is his normal practice. The notes for all the speeches that he has made in a political career of forty years would, in all likelihood, not equal the MS. of a single Budget speech of Mr. Gladstone. But from these few pencilled words he will evolve either the subtlest metaphysical analysis or the loftiest and broadest generalisations. He is too indifferent to the arts of oratory to have enjoyed a platform success at all comparable to his Parliamentary position. But even at mass meetings his logic, his play of humour, his immense resourcefulness, and his felicitous diction, have often won a conspicuous triumph.

His methods.

I could not pay a higher tribute to Mr. Balfour's versa-

tility than by selecting for quotation a passage from the class of speech from which *a priori* he would most naturally shrink, but in which his intellectual ascendency and width of outlook have more than once enabled him to excel. This is what he said in January, 1910, upon the death of Queen Victoria:

"Perhaps less known was the life of continuous labour which her position as Queen threw upon her. Short as was the interval between the last trembling signature affixed to a public document and the final and perfect rest, it was yet long enough to clog and hamper the wheels of administration; and when I saw the [illegible] of untouched documents which awaited the attention of her successor, I marvelled at the unostentatious patience which for sixty-three years, through sorrow, through suffering, in moments of weariness, in moments of despondency, had enabled her to carry on without break or pause her share in the government of this great Empire. For her there was no holiday, to her there was no intermission of toil. Domestic sorrow, domestic sickness, made no difference in her labours; and they were continued from the hour at which she became our Sovereign to within a few days—I had almost said a few hours—of her death. It is easy to chronicle the growth of empire, the course of discovery, the progress of trade, the triumphs of war, all the events that make history interesting or exciting. But who is there that will dare to weigh in the balance the effect which such an example, continued over sixty-three years, has produced on the higher life of her people?"

H. H. Asquith.

The present Prime Minister, Mr. Asquith, represents a type of public speaking carried to higher perfection than by anyone else in modern times. Possessed of a copious vocabulary, an extraordinary and effortless command of the right word, a remarkable gift of lucidity and compression, and a resonant voice, he produces an overpowering effect of Parliamentary and forensic strength. Whether in exposition or declamation, in opening or in reply, on a great subject or a small, he never falls below a certain stately level, even though he never soars above it into passion or kindles an audience into flame. Whenever I have heard him on a first-rate occasion, there rises in my mind the image of some great military parade. The words, the arguments, the points, follow each other with the steady tramp of regiments across the field; each unit is in its place, the whole marching in rhythmical order; the sunlight glints on the bayonets, and ever and anon is heard the roll of the drums.

The same characteristics are visible when he speaks from a platform. Where another speaker would stretch himself out over an hour and a quarter, Mr. Asquith has said all that is to be said in fifty minutes. It is a miracle of succinctness, the apotheosis of business-like efficiency. There is no gesticulation, no self-abandonment, no flash or glow, but the case is stated, illustrated, argued, and proven with a force that is almost stunning. Further, the Prime Minister is the master of one incomparable art—the result, I imagine, of early practice at the Bar. He can represent the weakest of cases as though it were of overwhelming strength, the most startling of innovations as though it were an everyday procedure, the most disputable of propositions as though it were an axiom of universal acceptance. This combination of gifts, intellectual, personal, rhetorical, renders Mr. Asquith a Parliamentary workman of the highest order.

His memorial tributes.

Never are these talents of concise and flawless expression better shown than on the occasion of his tributes to the illustrious dead. Of these I think that I should have selected for mention his eulogium upon King Edward, were it not that it has since been surpassed by his tribute to Alfred Lyttelton, an echo of the Virgilian cry that has rung down the ages: "Sunt lacrymae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt." He spoke as follows:

"Perhaps of all men of this generation Alfred Lyttelton came nearest to the mould and ideal of manhood which every English father would like to see his son aspire to and, if possible, attain. The bounty of nature, enriched and developed not only by early training, but by constant self-discipline through life, blended in him gifts and graces which taken alone are rare, and in such attractive union are rarer still. Body, mind, and character—the schoolroom, the cricket field, the Bar, the House of Commons—each made its separate contribution to the faculty and the experience of a many-sided and harmonious whole. But what he was he gave—gave with such ease and exuberance that I think it may be said without exaggeration that wherever he moved he seemed to radiate vitality and charm. He was, as we here know, a strenuous fighter. He has left behind him no resentments and no enmity: nothing but a gracious memory for a manly and winning personality—the memory of one who served with an unstinted measure of devotion his generation and his country. He has been snatched away in what we thought was the full tide of buoyant life still full of promise and of hope. What more can we say? We can only bow once again before the decrees of the Supreme

Wisdom. Those who loved him—and they are many, in all schools of opinion, in all ranks and walks of life—when they think of him, will say to themselves :

'This is the happy warrior, this is he
Whom every man in arms should wish to be.'"

A. Bonar Law.

Many good speakers there are or have been in the House of Commons in my time with whom it is impossible to deal here at any length. The present leader of the Unionist Party in that House, Mr. Bonar Law, would not have been chosen to succeed Mr. Balfour but for his powers of speech, which had given him a high reputation, though not as yet Cabinet office. The exercise of these powers in a field of authority, added to fearless courage, transparent sincerity, and an uncommon faculty for going straight to the heart of things, has justified that choice. What Mr. Bonar Law's future as a statesman may be, the gods hold in their lap. As a Parliamentary and public speaker, he possesses a gift unseen since the late Lord Salisbury—that of delivering a sustained and closely reasoned argument or attack for an hour without a single note. In part the result of an astonishing memory, in part of great intellectual quickness, this faculty as it is developed by practice, cannot fail to place him in the front rank of British Parliamentary successes.

Winston Churchill.

One of the few prominent speakers in the House of Commons who still cultivates, I will not say the classical, but the literary style, and at times practises it with great ability, is Mr. Winston Churchill. Like most talented speakers he is able to adapt himself to the need of the moment, but it may be conjectured that the form of speech which he prefers, and in which also he excels, is that in which structure, diction, and form—not perhaps unflavoured by invective—have been pressed into the service of an artistic whole. On the platform he adopts a double style. The exigencies of modern democracy seem indeed to require from its favourites a twofold gift—at one time the utterance of the statesman whose dignified periods allay apprehension and will one day take their place in an anthology of British

Eloquence, at another the "patter" of the music-hall artist who must tickle the taste of the "gods" in a transpontine "gallery."

D. Plunket.

In the Unionist party at the present time are two men, the one, alas! silent, the other in the prime of his activity and powers, to whom true eloquence cannot be denied. These are Lord Rathmore, better known when in the Lower House as Mr. David Plunket, and Lord Hugh Cecil, the youngest son of the late Lord Salisbury.

Mr. Plunket started with an inherited talent for oratory, for he was the grandson of one of Ireland's most famous orators, Lord Plunket. A fine presence, an easy manner, a musical voice (from which, as soon as he had cast loose, a stammer that somewhat impedes his utterance in ordinary conversation, entirely disappeared), and a command of picturesque and stately language, made him for over twenty years one of the favourites of the House of Commons. His best speeches were probably those on the Extension of the Household Franchise in Ireland in 1885, and on the Welsh Church Bill in 1895. But Mr. Plunket had not only the gifts but also the sensitive temperament of the orator. It was always an effort and anguish to him to speak, and, withdrawn into the sepulchral shades of the Upper Chamber in 1895, he relapsed into a silence which has never since been broken.

Lord Hugh Cecil.

Fortunately Lord Hugh Cecil suffers from no such self-imposed repression. His earnest swaying figure, his eager, high-pitched voice, are seen and heard in every important debate, and on many provincial platforms. His speaking is always intellectual, much of it is hard hitting and fierce. But from time to time the fire of eloquence is ignited on his lips, and the House is hushed to silence as it listens to words that combine the charm of music with the rapture of the seer. I will quote three such passages. The first was in a debate on the Resolutions preliminary to the Parliament Bill on March 30th, 1910:

"I look upon our Constitution with something much more than the

reverence with which a man of good taste would look upon an ancient and beautiful building. I look upon it as a temple of the twin deities of Liberty and Order which Englishmen have so long worshipped to the glory of their country. Let us then go into the temple, con over its stones, and saturate ourselves with its atmosphere, and then, continuing its traditions, let us adorn and embellish it. So we too shall partake of something of its renown, our figures will, perhaps, be found in it, and our names be graven on its stones. In this way we shall attain to a measure of its immortality, and high on the eminence of its glory our fame will stand secure, safe from the waters of oblivion, safe from the tide of time."

The second passage was in a debate on the Education Bill, on May 16th, 1902, when the speaker alluded to the school of thought "who may be described as adopting the position of Christianity in everything except its theology, who possess the morality of Christianity, its sense of right and wrong, its delicate sensitiveness of conscience, though they are unable to accept its theological basis," and went on:

"These men, it may be said, erect in the mansions of their hearts a splendid throne-room, in which they place objects revered and beautiful. There are laid the sceptre of righteousness and the swords of justice and mercy. There is the purple robe that speaks of the unity of love and power, and there is the throne that teaches the supreme moral governance of the world. And that room is decorated by all that is most beautiful in art or literature. It is gemmed by all the jewels of imagination and knowledge. Yet that noble chamber, with all its beauty, its glorious regalia, its solitary throne, is still an empty room."

Lastly, speaking on the Welsh Church Bill, on January 17th, 1913, he said:

"Though it is a fine thing to give education, there is something that comes closer, sooner or later, to the human heart. It is a comforting thing that the poor man should receive relief, adequate care and help in sickness. But there are two great crises—one that comes to every man, and one that comes to many—when these things appear comparatively small. In the presence of some great moral upheaval, some great spiritual crisis, in that agony of mind which alone such a crisis brings, it is not in education, medicine, or alms, that relief is to be found. There comes to every one that last great day when medicine has done its best, when all relief possible has been given, when the soul stands naked and trembling, face to face with all the horrors and wonders of Eternity. Then there is one light alone to lighten the darkness, then it is only in the Gospel, in which all the denominations alike believe, that hope and happiness and comfort are to be found."

These passages are prepared and studied eloquence; but they are eloquence of a high order, and they suggest that combination of spiritual fervour with a glowing imagination that was characteristic of some of the greatest orators of the past.

Irish Eloquence.

It would be surprising if Ireland, the land of Curran, Grattan, O'Connell, and Plunket, had not made a contribution to the eloquence of the British Parliament during the past half century that should be worthy of its ancient renown.

C. S. Parnell.

I sat opposite the Nationalist Party in the House of Commons during the twelve years in which they were forcing the Home Rule question from the obscurity of a local fad to the rank of the first political issue of the day—the years of political and agrarian crimes in Ireland, and tumult in Parliament—the years in which Parnell flared into a sudden and sombre prominence and as suddenly disappeared. Parnell was not eloquent, much less an orator. Possessed of singularly handsome features, he was slovenly in dress and untidy in appearance. He used to speak with one of his hands buried deeply in a front pocket of his trousers. He had no great command of language. But as he hissed out his sentences of concentrated passion and scorn, scattering his notes as he proceeded upon the seat behind him, he gave an impression of almost dæmonic self-control and illimitable strength. When he spoke for his party, in the tremendous moments of the crisis, Mr. Gladstone would move to the end of the front bench, and with his hand held behind his ear, listen to the freezing but impressive display with rapt attention. Either in the House or outside of it, Parnell appeared an isolated figure; "remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow," he came in and out without exchanging a word with anyone: the utmost concession that he appeared to make to companionship was when he would be met tramping the lobbies in earnest conversation with one of the few associates whom he deigned to consult.

One of Parnell's principal lieutenants, Mr. Sexton, had

very considerable oratorical gifts, and I remember Mr. Balfour publicly thanking him for the valuable assistance that he had rendered in debate in the shaping of one of the Irish Land Bills of that time. But the nickname with which *Punch* christened him, "Windbag Sexton," gave an unfair impression of his abilities, which were great, although the air of self-satisfaction with which his inexhaustible periods flowed from his lips was sometimes a source of irritation to his opponents.

T. Sexton.

At that time Mr. Redmond had not developed the powers either of speech or command which have since maintained him for over twenty years in the troubled but uncontested leadership of his party, and, as some allege, the dictatorship of British politics. One of the main sources of his success has been a power of speech, consistently verging upon eloquence, and sometimes tinged with genuine emotion. I have heard him described as the "Master of Parliamentary plausibility."

J. Redmond.

The most talented member of the Irish party, with an unsurpassed gift of corrosive humour and almost diabolical irony was, and is, Mr. Timothy Healy. His witty sallies were a great delight to a jaded House. Some of the best were perpetuated at the expense of the late Sir Richard Temple, whom Providence had not blessed with great natural beauty. "The Burmese idol nods"—was one interjection as Temple's head fell forward with a series of somnolent jerks upon his chest. On another occasion Temple had interjected a "No, no!" while Healy was speaking, only to be met by the irrepressible humorist with the rejoinder, "The hon. member is very great with his Noes (nose)." Though he now intervenes less frequently in debate, Mr. Healy always struck me for sheer cleverness as one of the best speakers I ever heard in the House of Commons, and on rare occasions—I recall one passage about the Catholic Church—he was lifted above himself and became inspired.

Timothy Healy.

The contemplation of speakers still with us has almost

tempted me to forget a number of figures who have now passed away, but who graced the boards and won the plaudits of their time. These seem to me to fall into three categories, according to the nature of their powers and influence—the statesmen, the rhetoricians, and the humorists. I will devote a few words to each class.

Fourteenth Earl of Derby.

The great Lord Derby, three times Prime Minister, was before my day. But he just came within the half century which I have attempted to cover, having died in 1869. He was

> "The brilliant chief, irregularly great,
> Frank, haughty, rash—the Rupert of debate"

depicted by Lord Lytton in the New Timon. That he excelled in every talent of the orator, in debate no less than in declamation, is established by the universal consensus of his contemporaries. But he may be said to belong to an earlier period, the records of which can be better traced elsewhere.

Fifteenth Earl of Derby.

I recall very clearly his son, the fifteenth Earl of Derby Foreign Minister in Disraeli's second administration. He was a frigid and monotonous but powerful speaker who seemed the embodiment of intellectual common-sense. His speeches were committed to memory, but the speaker somewhat marred their effect by a rather pompous and "mouthing" delivery.

Richard Cobden.

Mr. Cobden also belonged to an earlier generation. But in a review of Parliamentary Eloquence, it is impossible altogether to omit the man whose powers of luminous exposition acted as a foil to the fervid oratory of John Bright on a hundred platforms, and of whom so great a judge as Sir Robert Peel could say that his "eloquence was the more to be admired because it was unaffected and unadorned."

Gathorne Hardy.

A figure, unknown to the present generation, but very prominent in his day, was Mr. Gathorne Hardy, afterwards the first Earl of Cranbrook. He was one of Disraeli's most capable and trusted lieutenants, and certainly one of the ablest

speakers on the Front Bench in the House of Commons. He had a fine presence, great ease in delivery, excellent debating powers, and a refreshing vigour. At one time he was thought likely to reach the highest place in the ranks of his party.

W. E. Forster.

I heard some of Mr. Forster's most effective speeches at the time when he was denouncing Parnellism in the House of Commons. Rugged, shaggy, volcanic, forceful, totally destitute of grace or imagination, he was seriously considered at one time, as we know, for the leadership of his party, and was a notable and potent figure in debate.

G. J. Goschen.

There was no finer debater than Mr. (afterwards Lord) Goschen. His short sight, compelling him to hold his papers almost under his eyes, his harsh and rasping voice and his lack of grace in pose and action, were serious handicaps to any speaker. But he had intellect, courage, conviction, and fire. No man could state a case more finely for his party, or deliver a more comprehensive and crushing reply ; and on one occasion, at the famous meeting at His Majesty's Theatre in April, 1886, to inaugurate the anti-Home Rule Campaign, in rebutting the argument that assassination might have to be faced, he uttered the immortal phrase "we will make our wills and do our duty."

Arthur W. Peel.

I cannot refrain from mentioning here one man who, though prevented by the circumstances of his office from attaining a high position as a speaker or a Parliamentarian, was nevertheless one of the most imposing figures whom I remember in public life. This was Arthur Peel, afterwards Lord Peel, and for eleven years Speaker of the House of Commons. A more majestic presence in the Chair it was impossible to conceive. His pointed beard and heavy official wig caused him closely to resemble the picture of a Pharaoh on his throne; and his demeanour, when censuring an unruly member, rebuking an offender at the Bar, or composing a tumult in the House, was the quintessence of dignified grandeur. At such a moment—I forget to whom the

description was originally applied—"thunder clothed his brow," and the House listened in hushed awe. When he did make a speech on being elected or re-elected to the Chair, it was evident that he might have greatly excelled in the classical style of an earlier generation.

Second Sir Robert Peel.

His elder brother, the second Sir Robert Peel, though he made no mark in public life, had also inherited no mean rhetorical and dramatic attainments. Standing up to speak, as I saw him, on the benches below the gangway on the Conservative side, his almost foreign appearance, rich voice, animated gestures, and humour that seldom erred on the side of refinement, suggested great gifts which, if controlled and directed, might have led to influence and fame.

Earl Cairns.

In the 'seventies the Conservative party produced and were led for five years in the Upper House by a great lawyer who was also a statesman, a fine speaker, almost at moments an orator. This was the first Lord Cairns. An intellectual countenance, a distinguished and weighty manner, and a cultured diction, enabled him to overcome the drawbacks from which lawyers in Parliament are generally, though perhaps unfairly, believed to suffer. I heard his powerful speech on the evacuation of the Transvaal in the House of Lords in 1880, which he concluded with the apposite quotation from Abraham Cowley :—

> "We grieved, we sighed, we wept—we never blushed before."

At this point he rose to genuine eloquence. More commonly he was self-restrained, passionless, and cold.

Charles Bradlaugh.

Perhaps I should not omit to mention a Parliamentary figure of a very different type. This was Charles Bradlaugh, with whom I sat in the House of Commons for some years. Known as the "boy orator" of secular and atheistic circles in his youth, trained in the rough school of public disputation, a professional agitator of the most accomplished type, he created an extraordinary effect by the speech which he made when called to the bar of the House in June, 1880—a speech described by Mr. Gladstone in his

letter to the Queen as "the address of a consummate speaker." Later, when he obtained an uncontested entrance into the House, he impressed it greatly with his courage, sincerity, and oratorical power. Traces of his early career flashed out in his complete disregard of the aspirate when excited, and he had a peculiar trick of standing with his right leg raised upon the bench and his elbow resting upon it as he addressed the House. His towering bulk and resounding voice (which almost equalled the thunder of Mr. John Burns) added to the impression of weight and power, and I can well believe that had he pursued less violent lines of agitation or been identified with more popular causes, he might have obtained an influence with the democracy second only to that of Daniel O'Connell.

The rhetoricians.

I pass from the class of politicians who were speakers, to another class, the speakers who were politicians. I speak of a number of persons celebrated in their day, but now well-nigh forgotten, and of a class of speech which is not oratory but rhetoric, though the exaggeration of contemporaries sometimes mistakes it for the authentic article. These men were of very different order of merit, all had great abilities, and some attained to high office ; but the glitter and sparkle of their ornate art has left no permanent mark upon the history of their time. I seem to trace a lineal descent in these exponents of a style in which Canning, and to a less extent Macaulay, were acknowledged masters, but which in inferior hands could only achieve an ephemeral reputation. They are Richard Lalor Sheil, George Smythe (afterwards Lord Strangford), Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Robert Lowe, Patrick Smyth, and Joseph Cowen. Since the last named died the stock has become extinct and seems unlikely to be renewed.

R. L. Sheil.

Of these Sheil carried his art to the highest pitch of artificial elaboration. He was an essentially histrionic speaker, both in action and voice. "Did not Sheil scream?" some one asked of Mr. Gladstone. "He was all scream" is said to have been the reply. Professor Jebb seems to have thought that Sheil's famous apostrophe about the aliens in the House

of Commons in February, 1837, was an unmeditated effort produced by the sight of Lord Lyndhurst, who had applied the expression to Irishmen, seated under the gallery as he was making his speech. I cannot believe that this was the case. It is difficult to credit the unstudied and spontaneous origin of the references to the "steeps and moats of Badajos," or the catalogue of victories—Vimiera, Salamanca, Albuera, Toulouse, Waterloo,—or the peroration:

"When the chill morning dawned, their dead lay cold and stark together, in the same deep pit their bodies were deposited, the green corn of spring is now breaking from their commingled dust, the dew falls from heaven upon their union in the grave."

And if I wanted a confirmation for this view I should find it in the even more amazing example of the same style by the same speaker in his denunciation of the dying Duke of York in 1827, when he followed, so to speak, the corpse of the still living object of his invective from the death chamber to the funeral vault in St. George's—a gruesome and incredible example of perverted art.

I have only dwelt upon Sheil, who died in 1851, because he was the most accomplished professor of this academy. Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton, the novelist, who was Secretary for the Colonies in 1857, for a short time excited a wonderful sensation by similar displays. Men crowded to the House of Commons to hear the latest performance of "the orator of the century." Epigrams, antithesis, alliteration—all the conscious tricks of the trade—were packed into his ornate harangues, which no one now remembers.

Sir E. Bulwer Lytton.

A little later there appeared a far more accomplished exponent of the same art. This was Mr. Robert Lowe, afterwards Lord Sherbrooke, who, in the Session of 1866, rose to real fame by the burnished and scathing brilliance of his attacks upon the Reform Bill of that year. Scholarship, irony, paradox, wit, studied elaboration of form, all were weapons in the hands of the man who had the supreme advantage of attacking his party with the sympathy of the greater portion of the House behind him.

Robert Lowe.

Disraeli's friend, George Smythe, the hero of Coningsby, and the orator of the Young England Party, was one of the pathetic failures of English politics. But I have a speech by him delivered at Manchester in the company of Disraeli in 1844, which, I was told by one who remembered it, had caused a greater sensation than any oration of that time.

George Smythe.

Patrick Smyth, the bearer of a similar name, was an Irishman who, after an adventurous career, entered Parliament as a Nationalist member, and delivered there a series of elaborate speeches which earned for him a passing renown.

Patrick Smyth.

The last of the school was Joseph Cowen, Radical member for Newcastle, who, siding with Disraeli in his foreign policy, came out as a rhetorical exponent of Imperialism, in a series of speeches delivered partly in the House of Commons, partly on the platform, which caused an immense sensation, and were even thought by some to be masterpieces of the orator's art. They seem to be very full of grandiloquent platitudes and missfire epigrams now. Every word was committed by the speaker to memory, and recited in a strong Northumbrian accent that was almost unintelligible outside of Newcastle. John Bright cruelly said of Cowen, "he was a fine speaker if you did not listen to what he said." With Cowen this school of rhetoric came to an end, and in an age the temper and spirit of which I described in the opening pages of this address, it seems impossible that it should be revived.

Joseph Cowen.

Perhaps I ought to devote a word in passing to the humourists of the House during the period of which I have been speaking. Not that any of them were orators, although humour is a useful adjunct of oratory. But they did what oratory often fails to do: they pleased their hearers and relieved the dulness of Parliamentary life. Sir Wilfrid Lawson was a joker of the spontaneous and rollicking type, who combined a power of telling good stories and depicting grotesque situations with great charm of personality and an

Parliamentary humourists: Sir W. Lawson, Col. Saunderson, Dr. Wallace, H. Labouchere, A. Birrell.

ardent Radicalism. Col. Saunderson, an Irish Unionist member, gifted with a terrific brogue, which he had improved by practice, gave so genial and good-natured a display of Irish humour that he was loved by the Parnellite party whom he derided and exposed. Dr. Robert Wallace, an Edinburgh minister, professor, and journalist, clothed a biting wit in a literary garb so artistic that he kept the House, in which, by the way, he had a seizure and died, alternately hushed with expectancy and convulsed with laughter. Labouchere was the incurable cynic who mocked, at everybody, including himself. Mr. Birrell, the present Irish Secretary, has an instinctive gift of humour which does not desert him even on serious occasions, and is aided by irreproachable literary form. Bernal Osborne belongs to a rather earlier day; but in his prepared epigrams almost always lurked a poisoned dart, intended to pierce the bosom impartially of friend and foe.

The Professors in Parliament.

Another class of speakers in the House of Commons that has added to its intellectual distinction, and not infrequently to its eloquence, has been that of the Professors. I heard, I think, all of them in recent years, with the exception of John Stuart Mill, whose great literary reputation was perhaps not sustained by his rhetorical performances. As he delivered his maiden speech, Disraeli, fixing him with his eye-glass, is said to have murmured, "Oh, the finishing governess"; and this impression, encouraged by a weak voice and nervous manner, was never quite removed by the intellectual quality of the highly finished essays which this learned philosopher recited to the House. The blind Professor Fawcett was a sincere and powerful speaker; and so, in different ways, were the present Lord Courtney, Professor Jebb, who had a delicate gift of speech, Professor S. H. Butcher, a very able Parliamentarian, as well as a most accomplished man, and Professor Lecky. The figure of the latter, swaying to and fro, with not too graceful undulations, as he delivered the most admirable argument in a high and rather querulous treble voice, is a picture not easily forgotten. In some of these cases and

in others that I could mention, it was difficult not to think of the lecturer at his desk, addressing an audience of inferior mental calibre to the speaker; and when even the most famous of physicians advanced to the table, one almost expected to see him open the brass-bound box and extract a chemical retort from its recesses for purposes of demonstration.

The Episcopal Bench.

The bench of Bishops has in its time contributed much to the eloquence, as well as to the appearance and dignity of the Upper House. During the last half century its most noted orator was Samuel Wilberforce, Bishop of Oxford and Winchester, whose eloquence was of a very high order and, like his character, suggested the great ecclesiastical statesman rather than the divine. He leaped into fame by a speech on the Corn Laws in June, 1846, of which his biographer says that it ought to have been heard rather than read. I never had the good fortune to listen to Dr. Wilberforce. But I recall the terse and powerful speaking of Bishop Magee, who combined reasoning with sarcasm, and scholarship with humour, and whose best speech was delivered on the second reading of the Bill for the Disestablishment of the Irish Church in 1869. Bishop Creighton of London—a most ingenious and witty speaker at a dinner-table—might, had he lived, have become a power in debate. The present Archbishop of York (Dr. Lang) is the master of a scholarly and impressive style. But the ecclesiastic who, of all others, seemed to me in his speeches and person to embody most effectively the grave persuasiveness, the august authority, and the spiritual elevation of the Episcopal Bench, was Archbishop Tait.

The Parliamentary manner.

In studying the records of the speakers of the time, I find a phrase in constant use which excites a legitimate curiosity. It is said of So-and-so that he had the Parliamentary manner. This is an attribute that would appear to be quite independent of oratory or even of considerable powers of speech, because it is frequently applied to men who had neither; although on the other hand it may

coexist with both. The two most conspicuous illustrations of this gift, which is sometimes otherwise expressed as the being a great House of Commons man, appear to have been Walpole in the eighteenth century and Sir Robert Peel in the nineteenth century. Disraeli said at different times of Peel that he was "the greatest member of Parliament that ever lived," and that he "played on the House like an old fiddle." Someone else said of him that he was "the greatest member of Parliament since Walpole." Mr. Gladstone seems to have meant much the same thing when he declared that "Peel was the best man of business who was ever Prime Minister." The compliment clearly cannot relate to charm of manner any more than to gift of speech, because Peel was notoriously stiff, cold, and even repellent in manner. Both men were accomplished and versatile speakers, but neither was an orator. It can only relate, as it seems, to a power of managing the House of Commons, correctly understanding its temper, humouring its idiosyncrasies and piloting its wayward inclinations. In other words it is a form of tact, which in the case of a leader is perhaps the first condition of successful leadership. It is the particular tact that enables a man to make the House feel that he is of like temper with itself, playing the same game and observing its rules; not trying selfishly to coruscate or excel, but putting his own contribution of talent or eloquence into the common stock. Disraeli may have had this in mind when he wrote that "to make others feel we must feel ourselves, and to feel ourselves we must be natural." We may recall that Mr. Gladstone, who was a good judge, said that in the present generation Sir Edward Grey, who is a most impressive speaker, was the man with the real Parliamentary manner.

Manners of leaders.

It is a remarkable thing, possessing no necessary connection, either with the Parliamentary manner or with efficiency as a speaker, that so few of the great Parliamentary leaders would appear to have been popular with their followers at the time. In reading the memoirs or diaries of the past we

come across a stream of disparaging and frequently denunciatory criticism. Pitt was reserved and stand-off in manner. He never invited approach or encouraged acquaintance. Lord Rosebery wittily remarked that he turned up his nose at all mankind. Lord John Russell was shy and distant. He sought popularity neither with friend nor foe, and was accused—it is a strong word—of an offensive hauteur. Disraeli, though he paid more than one magnanimous tribute to Peel, and uttered the panegyric upon his Parliamentary abilities which I have quoted, described his manner as alternately haughtily stiff and exuberantly bland, adding that he made no attempt to conciliate the rank and file, and was supposed to regard them with contempt. Disraeli himself was profoundly distrusted, not merely by his opponents, but by his own party, throughout the greater part of his career, and remained a solitary and shrouded figure to the end. His final popularity was quite independent of any intimacy of relations between his followers and himself. Mr. Gladstone, in his mid-career, was regarded as an arrogant and domineering person, and even in my time I often heard him accused of marching through the lobbies without a sign of recognition of his expectant and obsequious friends. On the other hand, to those who addressed him, or whom he addressed, he appeared a model of old-world courtesy. Randolph Churchill was a mixture of rather elaborate civility and an outspoken rudeness that was at times brutal. He could be charming and he could be outrageous. I have heard him consign an able and worthy follower to the nether regions at the top of his voice while walking through the Division lobby. Lord Salisbury was wrapped in a cloak of aloofness, and seemed to move in another world, though I recall his unconcealed pleasure when on one occasion a working man pointed to him as he was walking down Pall Mall and whispered audibly to his mate, "There goes the Old Buffer!" I have heard analogous stories told of the brusqueness or indifference of leaders in more recent times. Almost the only Parliamentary leader against whom such charges were never brought were Melbourne and Palmerston.

Both were light-hearted and rather cynical men of the world, and Palmerston's long ascendency was due quite as much to his good humour and jokes and banter as it was to more intellectual qualities.

The above reflections might seem to justify the theory that personal charm is no part of the equipment of a political leader, and that if he plays his part well it does not matter much with what grace or acceptability he plays it. May we not rather seek an explanation in the foibles, not so much of the leader as of the led? May he not be preoccupied or shy where he is thought to be proud or indifferent? May they not be sensitive and over-exacting? After all, the popularity of a leader is usually in the same ratio as his success. Disraeli, who was once the suspect, became the idol of his party. Mr. Gladstone, from being taunted with arrogance, blossomed into the eventide splendour of the Grand Old Man. Popularity, in fact, comes to the leaders who wait long enough and do their work sufficiently well.

Modern audiences.

Our retrospect will, I think, have shown us that while there is no reason to deplore or to apprehend a cessation in the vogue of fine speaking in this country, its practice has in the passage of time taken on different and less ambitious forms in consonance with the more practical spirit of the age. Perhaps our best criterion will be to imagine the effect of certain of the acknowledged masterpieces of the past if delivered before a modern audience. Could Burke, if he were now living, deliver either in the House of Commons or before a judicial tribunal his wonderful passage about the descent of Hyder Ali on the Carnatic? Could a modern orator, if he were receiving the freedom of the borough of Plymouth, point to the men-of-war lying in the harbour and say, as Canning did, in language of almost sublime grandeur:

"You well know, gentlemen, how soon one of these stupendous masses, now reposing on those shadows in perfect stillness—how soon upon any call of patriotism or necessity, it would assume the likeness of an animated thing, instinct with life and motion; how soon it would ruffle, as it were, its swelling plumage, how quickly would it put

forth all its beauty and its bravery, collect its scattered elements of strength and awaken its dormant thunder."

If it be said that a Burke or a Canning could do it, the answer must be that we have neither a Burke nor a Canning, and that one shudders to think of any inferior professor attempting the task. In America it would be undertaken with confidence, even if it were not achieved with ease. But there the rhetoric assumes a more glowing guise; and though we are told that Mr. Bryan obtained the Democratic nomination for the Presidency of the U.S. in 1896 by the sentence, in relation to the free coinage of silver:

"You shall not press down on the brow of labour this crown of thorns; you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold"—

to us the triumph is inexplicable, and we feel somehow that the arrow has glanced off the mark.

Length of speeches.

In one respect modern speaking has undoubtedly gained as compared with that of an earlier time. Complaints are frequently made that speeches are too long and that the worst offenders are the occupants of the Front Benches. They seldom speak for less than one hour and often longer. The conventional speech of the star orator on a public platform is never less than an hour in length. I will not presume to say whether the same result could be better attained in forty-five or in fifty minutes; that is as it may be. What I do wish to make clear is that the present length is modesty itself compared with the performances of our ancestors. Chatham is usually said to have started the fashion of two to three hours' speeches. The practice was continued by his son and by the great champions of that day. Perhaps an excuse for it may be found in the fact that the great speakers were so few, the majority of the House of Commons being inarticulate, and consequently there were not enough speeches to go round. Fox and Pitt were very much in the position of two expert billiard players engaged in an exhibition match of so much "up." If one player made a break of five hundred, the other was expected to retaliate with at

least an equivalent score; and the audience were there to applaud and to bet on the result.

Anyhow the tradition grew up that length and eloquence were inseparable, and we find that the majority of the great speeches of the late Georgian and even the early Victorian epochs were from three to four hours in duration. Sheridan's speech on the Begums of Oude was five hours and forty minutes in length; Burke frequently spoke for between three and four hours. Brougham's speech on Law Reform in the House of Commons in February, 1828, lasted for six hours; and it was of the well-known occasion when he sank on his knees in the House of Lords and implored the Peers to pass the Reform Bill of 1831 that Lord Campbell sarcastically remarked:

"The peroration was partly inspired by draughts of mulled port, imbibed by him very copiously towards the conclusion of the four hours during which he was on his legs or on his knees."

Mr. Gladstone, in introducing the Budget of 1853, spoke for five hours. Lord Palmerston's celebrated Don Pacifico speech in June, 1850, spoken, as Mr. Gladstone somewhat hyperbolically remarked, "from the dusk of one day to the dawn of the next," and delivered without the aid of a note —assuredly one of the most astonishing feats in the history of the British Parliament—occupied four hours and forty minutes. Some of Mr. Lowe's Reform Bill speeches were from two to three hours in duration.

Have we not, therefore, amid many symptoms of decline, one ground for honest congratulation in our increasing self-restraint? Cobden and Bright once supported a resolution that no one should speak for more than an hour. Latter-day reformers have attempted to fix the limit at twenty minutes. The two Front Benches are fellow conspirators in resisting any such reform. But the movement towards greater conciseness that has already set in spontaneously may be expected to make progress even if the House of Commons declines to accelerate it by arbitrary restrictions.

Many of the orators whom we have discussed had

seats successively in the two Houses of Parliament; and it seems to be widely thought that the House of Lords has had a chilling and deteriorating influence upon eloquence that glowed and flourished in the more stimulating atmosphere of the Lower Chamber. Chatham, it has been said, lost his power by going to the House of Lords; Walpole spoke there infrequently and with reluctance; Brougham declined in influence after he attained the Woolsack; Macaulay never spoke at all after becoming a Peer. The inference, which is probably in any case fallacious, does not seem to be borne out by the experience of our time. Lord Derby, the Prime Minister, lost nothing by going to the House of Lords. Indeed he was called up to it with his own consent seven years before he succeeded to the Earldom. The late Lord Salisbury's peculiar gifts of speech, which might have been thought especially suited to the Commons, were equally effective in the Lords. The Duke of Argyll deliberately preferred that House to any other audience. Certain well-known speakers in our own day, I may instance Lords St. Aldwyn, Loreburn, and Haldane, have spoken even better in the Upper Chamber than they did in the House of Commons. It is impossible to say what Lord Rosebery's eloquence might have achieved in the Lower House, where it was never heard. But no one can say that in the Upper House it has been deprived either of a worthy stage, or an admiring audience. The House of Commons could hardly have made a better or more finished debater of the present Lord Lansdowne. It is true that to a man accustomed to the electric atmosphere of the Lower Chamber, with its cheering and counter-cheering and all the excitement of a popular assembly, the still and motionless firmament of the Upper House, with its austere silences and its rare murmurs of Olympian applause, is like exchanging the temperature of a stokehole for that of a refrigerating chamber. But the freedom from interruption, the perfect fairness of the audience, and the hushed serenity of the scene, are compensations by no means to be despised. On the whole,

Influence of House of Lords on oratory.

while granting that in a democratic age a seat in one chamber may mean power and in the other comparative extinction, there seems to be no reason for believing that eloquence itself need be affected by the translation. Though the range of influence may be restricted, the quality of the art need not decline.

The two styles.

Disraeli in an enigmatic passage in the "Young Duke," said that there were two distinct styles of speaking required by the two Chambers. "I intend," he added, "in the course of my career, if I have time, to give a specimen of both. In the Lower House 'Don Juan' may perhaps be our model, in the Upper House 'Paradise Lost.'" His own House of Commons speeches had certainly much of the licence of the former parallel. But greatly as I respect the House of Peers, I have never heard anything in it, even from Lord Beaconsfield, that remotely resembled "Paradise Lost."

Parliamentary career of lawyers.

It would be interesting to pursue the study of the rival methods of eloquence in Parliament and at the Bar, and to inquire how far forensic triumph has been the prelude to Parliamentary success. With every election more and more lawyers enter the House of Commons; as someone said, they are usually birds of passage there, on their way to some more permanent resting-place; but they are very much to the fore in debate; important and lucrative offices are open exclusively to them, and, as the careers of Mr. Asquith and Sir E. Carson have shown, the prizes of political leadership are within their grasp. There seems to be a general impression that lawyers are not generally successful or popular in the House of Commons, and that the abilities which may have won fame in cross-examining witnesses or winning verdicts from juries are not those suited to Parliamentary debate. This is a generalisation which instances might be found to support. Erskine, who was incomparable in the Law Courts, was a comparative failure in the House of Commons. In our own days Sir Charles Russell never achieved in the House anything approaching the triumphs which rarely failed

him at the Bar. The same might be said of Sir Francis Lockwood, of Sir Horace (afterwards Lord) Davey, of Mr. Henry Matthews (afterwards Lord Llandaff), and of other cases even more recent. If there be such a law or even tendency, the explanation may perhaps lie partly in the fact that lawyers only come down to the House when their day's work is over and they are relatively tired. But it also lies in the different nature of the problems they approach, and the audiences they address. The House of Commons dislikes that which is didactic, and recoils from that which is dull. It never quite forgave hair-splitting, even when it was Mr. Gladstone's foible. It will not accept it as the armoury of smaller men. Possibly also the House is a little suspicious of professions other than its own. These, however, may be fanciful suggestions, and recent experiences seem to point to an extension of the influence achieved by lawyers in the House of Commons. Moreover, I recall that one of the most remarkable speeches made in the House of Commons in my time was that in which Sir E. Clarke, following immediately after Mr. Gladstone's speech in introducing the Home Rule Bill of 1893, dissected and answered it point by point with astonishing brilliancy and force. Sir E. Clarke was said to have been equally prepared for any one of two or three other alternative schemes that Mr. Gladstone might have produced. But in any case it was a wonderful performance. The Upper House is that in which forensic abilities have as a rule found a more congenial field, and the Woolsack has been occupied by many great lawyers who were also great speakers. Among these during the past century may be mentioned the names of Eldon, Brougham, Lyndhurst, and Cairns.

A number of questions have been suggested by our inquiry to which I may endeavour to give an answer.

Nervousness of speakers.

Are great speakers generally nervous, and if so, does their nervousness detract from their speaking? I have mentioned one or two cases in the course of this narrative. Mr. Gladstone, in answer to the same query, once said that he was frequently

nervous in opening, but never in reply. John Bright was intensely nervous at starting. Bishop Wilberforce confessed to being nervous even in the pulpit. I doubt if any good speaker can plead immunity from nerves, or has any clear idea, before he begins, whether he is going to make a good speech, a bad speech, or an indifferent speech. This applies, of course, much more to Parliament than to the platform, where the conditions are more stable, and can be more safely predicted. In Parliament so much turns on the accident of the moment, the temper of the House, the number present, the speeches that have preceded. The nervousness of the inexperienced speaker who is waiting to begin is visible in his manner and movements, but even the "old hand" is often some time before he warms to his task. A speaker who has no nerves will probably never attain to the first rank of Parliamentary orators—which perhaps may explain why the hero of the platform is so often a failure in the House. On the other hand, I doubt if any considerable speaker is nervous when he has once gained the ear of his audience, while the expert debater, so far from feeling apprehensive, looks forward with eager expectancy to his reply.

Appearance and action.

Another question may be put: Is an orator greatly assisted by grace of manner, voice, and action, and is he correspondingly handicapped by an uncomely or ignoble appearance, harsh accents, inelegant gestures, or unconscious tricks? *A priori* there can be but one answer to these questions; and, in the art of great orators like Chatham, Gladstone, Daniel O'Connell, or Bright, it is clear that a large part was played by the splendour or harmony of their physical endowment. On the other hand genius is beyond and above the law; and far more common than the spectacle of eloquence reinforced by grace of manner or dignity of person, is that of the orator triumphing over physical obstacles or mannerisms that might be thought fatal to success. Burke was angular and awkward in his gestures; Mirabeau was ugly almost beyond words. Pitt used to saw the air with his arms like a windmill; Abraham Lincoln was gaunt

and dishevelled, and, until excited, spoke with a shrill and piping voice; Grattan indulged in very violent gestures and swayed his body to and fro, till "at last his genius carried all before it, and, as in the oracles of old, the contortions vanished as the inspiration became manifest." Peel, though gifted with a very handsome presence, had a trick of putting his hands under his coat tails while speaking which somewhat detracted from his dignity. Lord Macaulay went off at the speed of an express train, his action was ungainly, and his voice loud and without modulation. Sheil not only screamed, but did it in almost unintelligible accents. Lord John Russell was notoriously insignificant.

Two things are clear. With the decline of oratory, all attempts to make a study of action, manner, or even delivery, have been abandoned. Secondly, as speaking becomes less dramatic and more business-like, even unstudied action falls every day into greater disuse. The foreigner who is accustomed to see a French or Italian orator declaiming in the tribune, rushing up and down, waving his arms, beating the desk, and throwing his body into violent postures, is astonished at the spectacle of the English Parliamentarian standing almost motionless at the table, his hands clinging to the lapels of his coat, or perhaps toying with a pince-nez, his most violent action being in all probability a mild castigation of the brass-bound box in front of him. As to what would happen if a British orator indulged in the *supplosio pedis*, or stamping of the feet, which was one of the most restrained of the gestures prescribed in the Greek school of rhetoric, I shudder to think.

The answer then appears to be that orators make their own gestures; that gesture of any sort is dying out; and that while a great orator is doubtless aided by a handsome exterior and graceful action, it does not matter very much even if he happens to be ugly and awkward. Anyone who saw or heard the late Bishop Magee would realise how little dependent upon physical accessories it is possible for successful orators to be.

Perorations.

It almost goes without saying from what has passed that the peroration, in the sense of the rhetorical summing-up of a speech, with peculiar attention to thought, diction, and form, is dying also. Or rather —for speakers must end somehow, and it is well to round off a speech with a sentence that has some regard both to euphony and grammar—the short staccato peroration is taking the place of the long and rolling periods of our ancestors which followed each other to the finale, like Atlantic breakers breaking in foam and thunder on the beach. In those days the audience looked eagerly for the premonitory signs of the peroration, because there the orator would crystallise his argument, allow his fancy to take final wing, and appeal to the spiritual part of his hearers. Now it is to be feared that they are, as a rule, awaited as a timely signal of the approaching end. I do not know a single living speaker, with the possible exception of Lord Hugh Cecil, who perorates in Parliament as did Gladstone and Bright. The platform peroration of a sort still lingers in the mouths of those who conclude by adjuring their hearers to hand down undiminished to posterity this great Empire, etc., etc. But with this exception, which is purely conventional, the peroration is almost obsolete, and as it is, or was, the last part of a speech to be delivered, so does it appear to be the last feature of the art of rhetoric that is likely to be revived. Dr. Hornby, Headmaster of Eton in my day, who was one of the most finished after-dinner speakers that I ever heard, and who always left his audience in doubt as to how far his art was impromptu or prepared, said to a friend of mine, "Above all things, take special pains about your peroration—you never know how soon you may require it." But I suspect that in this witty remark he was providing a prescription for sitting down with dignity rather than for finishing with eloquence.

Phrase-making.

In common with perorations, and other literary graces, I cannot help thinking that phrase-making —the art in which Disraeli excelled—and the faculty of repartee, have also declined. The former, which is rarely spontaneous, is no doubt dis-

appearing along with other symptoms of prepared effort. Randolph Churchill pursued this branch of the art in rather a vulgar style. "Vineries and pineries," and "an old man in a hurry," were characteristic specimens. Lord Salisbury dropped naturally into literary epigram or alliteration, as when he spoke of the "dreary drip of dilatory declamation." But this was not high art. Mr. Gladstone's phrases—"dim and distant future," "a strategical movement to the rear," "Political Economy banished to Saturn," "the resources of civilisation not exhausted," etc., were destitute of literary merit, and were, as a rule, political weapons forged by himself but turned against him by his opponents. John Morley's "mending or ending" was a useful jingle, but hardly a phrase. We have fallen, in later times, to the level of "terminological inexactitude" and "rare and refreshing fruit," which are not literary nuggets but political tags. The Parliamentary or platform speaking of the last twenty-five years has, I believe, not thrown up a single phrase that is destined to survive. I was myself the author of one—when I described the function of the Foreign Press correspondent as "the intelligent anticipation of events before they occur." But, though I see it frequently quoted, I can detect no merit in the saying.

Repartee.

I have searched my memory to think if in the same period there have been any notable illustrations of that which is the most useful subsidiary adjunct of Parliamentary eloquence, viz., retort and repartee. Mr. Gladstone once said that the finest repartee that he had ever heard in the House of Commons was the reply of Lord John Russell to Sir Francis Burdett, who, after turning Tory and joining the Carlton Club, had sneered at the cant of patriotism. "I quite agree," replied Lord John, "that the cant of patriotism is a bad thing. But I can tell him a worse, namely, the recant of patriotism." To my mind one of the readiest and at the same time most finished examples of Parliamentary repartee that were ever heard in the House of Commons, was the retort of Sir Robert Peel in 1848 to Feargus O'Connor, who, charged with being a Republican, had denied it, and said

that he did not care whether the Queen or the Devil was on the throne. Peel replied:

"When the Hon. Member sees the Sovereign of his choice on the throne of these realms, I hope he will enjoy, as I am sure he will deserve, the confidence of the Crown."

No such gem as this can be discovered in the Parliamentary diggings of the past quarter of a century, and I am driven to wonder whether the art has perished or whether we are merely degenerate men.

Maiden speeches.

In Parliamentary memoirs frequent reference is made to the maiden speeches of orators who afterwards became famous, and the diarist is apt to read into his own recollection an anticipation of the fame that was to be. I have heard a great many maiden speeches, and I once made one. Nothing can exceed the generosity of the two Houses on such an occasion. Men hurry in to cheer the performance of the youthful novice, or even of the man who has entered the House in middle life. Any symptoms of promise are eagerly welcomed and generously exaggerated, and the speaker, if successful, finds a warm welcome on his next appearance. But the conditions under which the maiden speech is delivered are such as to deprive it of any real value as a test of ability or merit, and most of the stories, whether of success or failure (and this applies even to the famous case of Disraeli), should be subject to a very considerable discount. Occasionally, a maiden speech turns out to be an epitome of qualities or talents that designate the speaker to impending fame. In recent years, the most conspicuous case of this was the maiden speech of Mr. F. E. Smith, the prelude to many subsequent triumphs both in the House and on the platform.

The supreme masterpieces.

In this long review of the Parliamentary achievements of the past, the question may be asked whether any speech or speeches appear to stand out as the best and most perfect examples of the art whose many phases I have examined. It is as impossible to say with confidence of any speech that it was the best ever made, or made in a particular period or country, as to

say that any one day was the finest day in the year, or any piece of scenery the finest in this or that continent. Three speeches, however, in the English language have always appeared to me to emerge with a superiority which, if not indisputable, will perhaps not be seriously disputed—much in the same way as the Funeral Oration of Pericles was generally allowed to be the masterpiece of the ancient world. Two of them just fall within the period that we have passed in review, but were not made in England or by an Englishman. The third was made—or is said to have been made (because there is some doubt as to the actual words)—by an Englishman half a century earlier.

William Pitt.

Ten weeks before Pitt died, his health was drunk at the Lord Mayor's Dinner, after the victory of Trafalgar, as the Saviour of Europe. The dying man responded in these memorable and immortal terms:

"I return you many thanks for the honour you have done me. But Europe is not to be saved by any single man. England has saved herself by her exertions, and will, as I trust, save Europe by her example."

Abraham Lincoln.

Abraham Lincoln was the author of both the other speeches. Everyone knows them, they are part of the intellectual patrimony of the English-speaking race. But they may once again admit of repetition here, as a model and an inspiration. At the Gettysburg Cemetery on November 19th, 1863, he thus spoke:

"Fellow countrymen—Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

"Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fit and proper that we should do this.

"But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow, this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus so far nobly advanced. It is rather for us

to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us; that from these honoured dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."[1]

Pitt's speech occupied only a few seconds in delivery, Lincoln's less than three minutes: and yet where are the world-famed pages, the crowded hours of rhetoric, compared with these? At Gettysburg, Edward Everett, the orator, had been set down to make the great oration, and he made it; Lincoln was merely introduced for "a few remarks" at the close of the proceedings. But the oration is forgotten and the remarks will live for ever.

The Second Inaugural Address of the same speaker, delivered at Washington on March 4th, 1865, a month before his assassination, contained this famous passage about the causes and issue of the Civil War:—

"If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offences which in the Providence of God must needs come, but which, having continued through his appointed time, he now wills to remove, and that he gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offence came, shall we discern there any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to him? Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's 250 years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn by the sword, then, as was said 3,000 years ago, so still it must be said that the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."[2]

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[1] The story has often been told that these words were hastily scribbled by Lincoln on a sheet of paper as he went in a tramcar to the cemetery. I was assured by his son that the story is without foundation. The speech was composed at the White House before Lincoln started from Washington, and committed to memory. The published version was written out after he returned.

[2] Lincoln was equally good at improvised invective and retort. Replying at a mass meeting to a speaker who had changed his politics and been rewarded with a post, for the discharge of the duties of which he had acquired a fine house and set up a lightning conductor on the roof, Lincoln, whom the turncoat had taunted with his youth, said, "I am not so young in years as I am in the tricks and trade of the politician. But whether I live long or die young, I would rather die now than change my politics for an office worth $3,000 a year, and have to erect a lightning rod over my house to protect my conscience from an offended God."

Neither of these passages was extemporaneous. Both were written in advance; one was recited and the other read. They violate the canons, therefore, of those who apply the test of improvisation to oratory. I quote them here because they seem to me to represent better than any explanation or definition could do that which is not rhetoric nor declamation, nor even sermonising, but the purest gold of human eloquence, nay, of eloquence almost divine. Either could be delivered, if a man capable of composing and delivering them were to exist, in any assemblage, before any audience, at any time of the modern world's history, without a suggestion of artifice or incongruity, with an effect inexorably sure and eternally true. They were uttered by a man who had been a country farmer and a district lawyer before he became a statesman. But they are among the glories and the treasures of mankind. I escape the task of deciding which is the masterpiece of modern English eloquence by awarding the prize to an American.

INDEX

ADDISON quoted, 34
Alcibiades, 33
Aldwyn, Viscount, 65
Argyll, Duke of, 32–33, 65
Aristotle, 2, 5
Asquith, H. H., 11, 45–47, 66
Atterbury, Bishop, 20

BACON, Francis, 6
Balfour, A. J., 6, 17, 25, 30, 43–45, 51
Birrell, A., 58
Bolingbroke, Viscount, 6
Bradlaugh, Charles, 25, 54–55
Bright, John, 5, 12, 16, 17, 18, 30–32, 52, 57, 64, 68, 70
Brougham, Lord, 18, 19, 64, 65, 67
Bryan, R. J., 63
Burdett, Sir F., 9, 71
Burke, Edmund, 5, 7, 8, 62, 64, 68
Burns, John, 55
Butcher, S. H., 58
Butler, Dr. H. M., 1
Byron, Lord, quoted, 7

CAIRNS, Earl, 54, 67
Campbell, Lord, quoted, 64
Canning, George, 8, 9, 11, 19, 21, 40, 62, 63
Carson, Sir E., 66
Castlereagh, Viscount, 21
Cecil, Lord Hugh, 48–50, 70
Chamberlain, Joseph, 35, 37, 39–40
Chatham, Earl of (W. Pitt), 6, 8, 12, 14, 18, 23, 63, 65, 68
Churchill, Lord Randolph, 15, 37–38, 61, 71
Churchill, Winston, 47–48
Cicero, 8, 11
Clarke, Sir E., 67
Classics, study of, 8, 11
Cobden, Richard, 28, 52, 64
Courtney, Lord, 58
Cowen, Joseph, 57
Cowley, Abraham, quoted, 54
Creighton, Bishop, 59
Curran, T. B., 50

DAVEY, Sir H. (Lord Davey), 67
Democracy, Eloquence in a, 23
Demosthenes, 11
Derby, 14th Earl of, 52, 65
Derby, 15th Earl of, 52
Devonshire, Duke of, 36–37
Disraeli, B. (Earl of Beaconsfield), 11, 12, 27–30, 33, 35, 38, 56, 60, 70, 72; quoted, 2, 9, 25, 58, 60, 61, 62, 66

EIGHTEENTH Century oratory, 8–14
Eldon, Earl of, 67
Ellenborough, Lord, 32
Eloquence, conditions of modern, 8, 10–23
Eloquence, meaning of, 2–4
Empire, British, Lord Rosebery on, 42
Erskine, Lord, 20, 66
Everett, Edward, 74
Extempore speaking, 17–20, 44

FAWCETT, Professor, 58
Forensic eloquence, 20
Forster, W. E., 25, 53
Fowler, H. E. (Viscount Wolverhampton), 22
Fox, Charles James, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 14, 18, 63

GARIBALDI, 24
Garrison, W. Lloyd, 31
George, D. Lloyd, 15, 23
Gesture in speaking, 68–69
Gladstone, W. E., 6, 11, 12, 16, 22, 23–27, 28, 30, 32, 33, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 43, 50, 54, 55, 60, 61, 62, 64, 67, 70, 71
Goschen, G. J. (Viscount Goschen), 53
Grattan, Henry, 11, 19, 23, 50, 69

Greek oratory, 2, 3, 69
Grey, Sir Edward, 60

HALDANE, Viscount, 65
Harcourt, Sir W., 12, 33-34
Hardy, Gathorne (Earl of Cranbrook), 52-53
Hastings, Warren, 7
Healy, Timothy, 51
Horace, 8
Hornby, Dr. H., 70
House of Commons, character of, 9, 11, 13, 16
House of Lords, eloquence in, 65

IRISH eloquence, 49-51
Isocrates, 5

JEBB, Professor R. C., 2, 19, 55, 58
Jonson, Ben, 6
Juvenal, 8

KNIGHTLEY, Sir R., 34

LABOUCHERE, Henry, 25, 58
Lamartine, 16
Lansdowne, Marquis of, 65
Lang, Archbishop, 59
Law, A. Bonar, 47
Lawson, Sir Wilfrid, 28, 57
Lecky, W. H., 58
Lincoln, Abraham, 18, 23, 68, 73-74
Lockwood, Sir F., 67
Loreburn, Earl, 65
Lowe, Robert (Viscount Sherbrooke), 56, 64
Lyndhurst, Lord, 56, 67
Lyttelton, Alfred, 46
Lytton, Sir E. Bulwer, 51, 56

MACAULAY, T. B. (Lord Macaulay), 5, 19, 22, 40, 65, 69
Macdonald, Ramsay, 23
Machiavelli quoted, 5
Magee, Bishop, 59, 69
Maiden speeches, 72
Manners, Lord John, 28
Manners, Parliamentary, 60-61
Mansfield, Lord, 20
Matthews, Henry (Viscount Llandaff), 67
Melbourne, Viscount, 61
Mill, John Stuart, 58
Milton, John, 3
Mirabeau, 3, 16, 68
Moore, T., quoted, 26
Morley, John (Viscount), 6, 25, 40, 71

NERVOUSNESS in speaking, 67-68
North, Lord, 12

O'CONNELL, Daniel, 14, 16, 50, 55, 68
O'Connor, Feargus, 71
Oratory, meaning of, 2, 4, 5
Osborne, Bernal, 58

PALMERSTON, Viscount, 61, 64
Parliamentary manner, the, 59
Parnell, C. S., 50
Peel, Arthur W. (Viscount Peel), 53-54
Peel, Sir Robert, 27, 53, 60, 71, 72
Peel, Sir Robert (junior), 54, 72
Percy, Earl, 11
Pericles, 3, 33, 73
Perorations, 70
Phrases in oratory, 29, 70
Pitt, William, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14, 18, 61, 63, 68, 73, 74
Platform oratory, 15-16, 23, 38, 54
Plunket, David (Lord Rathmore), 48
Plunket, Lord, 22, 50
Pope quoted, 34
Press, influence of, 14
Professors in Parliament, 58-59

QUOTATIONS, Classical, 8, 11, 12, 25

REDMOND, John, 51
Repartee, 71-72
Reporting, effect of, 14
Rhetoric, 2
Rhetoricians, the, 55-57
Rosebery, Earl of, 41-43, 65; quoted, 14, 61
Russell, Sir Charles (Lord Russell), 66, 71
Russell, G. W., 31
Russell, Lord John (Earl), 9, 61, 69, 71

ST. ALDWYN, Viscount, 65
Salisbury, Marquis of, 34-36, 47 61, 65, 71
Saunderson, Col., 58
Savonarola, 5, 30
Scott, Sir W., quoted, 5
Sexton, Thomas, 50-51
Shakespeare, 12
Sheil, R. L., 55-56, 69

Sheridan, R. B., 7, 19, 64
Smith, F. E., 72
Smyth, P. J., 57
Smythe, George (Viscount Strangford), 57
Snowden, P., 23
Socrates, 33
Sophocles, 11

TAIT, Archbishop, 59
Temple, Sir R., 51
Thucydides, 3, 8

VIRGIL, 8

WALLACE, Dr. R., 58
Walpole, Sir Robert, 60, 65
Webster, Daniel, 5
Wellington, Duke of, 21
Wilberforce, Bishop S., 59, 68
Wilberforce, W., 7, 20, 22
Windham, W., 15, 18

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